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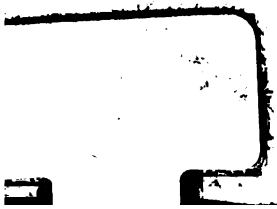

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THE

TRIUMPH OVER MIDIAN.

BY

A. L. O. E.,

AUTHOR OF "THE SHEPHERD OF BETHLEHEM," "EXILES IN BABYLON," "RESCUED FROM EGYPT," ETC.

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Preface.

IN attempting to illustrate the history of the victory of Gideon, I am conscious that I am entering on well-trodden ground. Others have gathered the lessons and examined the types with which that portion of the Scripture-field is so richly studded. I lay claim to little originality of thought on the subject which I have chosen. A humble task has been mine; that of endeavouring to show that the same faith by which heroes of old *out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens*, is still, as the gift of God's grace, bestowed on the lowliest Christian. Writing as I have done, under the depressing influence of domestic sorrow, and the languor of weak health, I feel how very imperfectly

have executed my task; but I humbly commend my little work to Him who despiseth not the feeble, and whose blessing on the humblest instrument can make it effectual in His service.

A. L. O. E.

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THE

TRIUMPH OVER MIDIAN.

CHAPTER I.

THE RETURN.

"HOME, once more at home!" how joyful sounded the exclamation from the lips of Edith Lestrange, and how brightly sparkled her eyes as she uttered it, as, with a step light as a fawn's, she revisited each spot which five years' absence had only made more dear. With joyous impatience she ascended the broad oaken staircase of Castle Lestrange, to flit like a fairy from room to room, lingering longest in the old nursery, where she had known childhood's pleasures with not a few of its sorrows—and the playroom, in which her toys were still stored. There was the doll that had been to her as a companion, to which the lonely little heiress had whispered many a trouble; the pretty picture-books, the miniature

tea-things of delicate china, that had been such sources of amusement. It was a pleasure to Edith, from recollections of "auld lang syne," to touch and handle these childish treasures, though at the age of eleven she deemed herself no longer a child.

Then to the newly-returned traveller how great were the delights of the garden and the park, the one bright with the flowers of spring, the other donning its light green robe, while in the sheltered mossy dells fragrance of violets filled the air. Edith almost wondered that the light-footed deer should bound away on her approach: her heart felt so full of joy and kindness, that it seemed strange that any living creature should fear her. The heiress of Lestrange took pleasure in visiting the cottage of her father's steward, where the familiar faces of Holdich and his wife were as the faces of old friends, bright with hearty welcome. Her canary, cared for by Mrs. Holdich during her absence, was tamer than ever, and its quivering notes of delight seemed to its youthful mistress an echo of the music of happiness which sounded within her own soul.

For Edith did not return to the castle of her ancestors as she had left it five years before—a feeble, fragile invalid. She no longer painfully dragged her weary limbs along, with languor oppressing her spirits; springing and elastic was the step which now bounded over the mossy turf. The cheeks that had been almost as colourless as the

snowdrop had now a faint dawn of colour upon them, like that on the opening buds of the apple-blossom. Edith was still a delicate plant, like an exotic reared in a hot-house, but an exotic skilfully tended, expanding its petals in healthful life.

"Oh, how true it is that there is no place like home!" exclaimed Edith, as she sauntered up the broad avenue, with sunshine on her path, and the blue cloud-flecked sky smiling above her.

The observation was addressed to her cousin, Isa Gritton, who was spending a day at the castle, a short time after the return of Sir Digby Lestrange and his daughter. Isa was a young lady whose age might be about two or three and twenty, and who might therefore have scarcely been deemed a suitable companion for one so youthful as Edith, had not the little heiress possessed a mind so early matured by the discipline of trial that she was scarcely regarded as a child by those who intimately knew her. Isa Gritton was a tall and graceful girl, with auburn hair, and eyes like those of the gazelle —large, soft, and expressive: mirroring each passing emotion, whether it were that of mirth and gladness, or, as was now the case, a shadow of painful thought.

"Do you not feel with me," said Edith, "that there is a charm in the very name of *home?*"

"I did so once," replied Isa, with a sigh; "but for the last two years, since the loss of my dear father, I cannot be said to have had a real home."

"But you have one now, dear Isa," said Edith; "and, oh, how glad I am that your brother chose to build one at Wildwaste, so near us. Why, even I —who never perform great feats in the walking line—will be able to manage the distance on foot; it is barely a mile, I hear. I daresay that Mr. Gritton kindly chose the site of his house there on purpose that you might be near your uncle and cousin. To meet you often, very often, will be such a pleasure to me; I shall feel as if I had at last what I have so often longed for, a sister to share all my sorrows and joys. I will soon return your visit, and you shall show me your brother's new house. Has he not built a charming retreat, with a pretty garden and shrubbery round it?"

Isa Gritton laughed: but there was a little bitterness in the laugh. "Tastes differ," she replied, "and Gaspar having been his own architect, he doubtless admires his work. But my ideal of beauty is hardly realized by a house that looks as if a geni had transplanted it bodily from one of the smaller streets of London, in all the newness of yellowish brick as yet undarkened by soot, and had dropped it on the edge of a morass—not a tree within half a mile of it—where it stands staring out of its blindless windows as if wondering how it came there, with nothing to remind it of London but the great soap manufactory, which is the most conspicuous object in the view, the smoke of which

might do duty for that of a whole street in the city."

"How could Mr. Gritton build such a house, and in such a place!" exclaimed Edith in surprise; "I could not fancy you in a home that was not pretty and picturesque. I have no clear remembrance of Wildwaste save as a wide flat common sprinkled with gorse, for I seldom or never visited the hamlet when I was a little child."

"You will scarcely care to visit it often now, except out of compassion for me," said Isa, smiling. "Mr. Eardley tells me, however, that Wildwaste, bad as it is, is greatly improved from what it was some years ago, when it had nothing in the shape of a school."

"Mr. Eardley — then you know him?" cried Edith, brightening at the mention of the pastor whom she reverenced and loved.

"Yes," replied Isa; "though Wildwaste not being in the parish of Axe, we do not belong to his flock. Mr. Eardley had heard, through your steward's wife, I believe, that we wanted a girl to help in the house. He called to recommend to us a young protegée of his own, a black-eyed gipsy-looking little creature, who blushes scarlet when she is spoken to, and seems to be afraid of the sound of her own voice. I think, however, that with a little training Lottie Stone will suit us very well."

"Do you not like Mr. Eardley?" said Edith, looking

as if assured that the answer must be in the affirmative.

"Very much; I wish that he were our clergyman instead of Mr. Bull, who must be nearly eighty years old, and who—but I don't think it well to criticise preachers."

"We attend the service at Axe—we drive there, for it is much too far off for a walk," said Edith Lestrange. "You shall come with us every Sunday —that is to say," she added with a little hesitation, "if you don't mind leaving your brother. Papa does not like more than three in the carriage."

"Perhaps I ought not to leave Gaspar," said Isa gravely; and she added, but not aloud, "if I were not with him I fear that he would not go to a place of worship at all. No, Edith," she said to her cousin, "I am afraid that I cannot accompany you to Axe on Sundays, but I have promised Mr. Eardley to bring Lottie twice a week to the little cottage-lectures which he gives in the dwelling of Holdich the steward."

"Then we shall always meet there," observed Edith. "I have such a sweet remembrance of those cottage-meetings, though I was such a little girl when I went to them, that of course I could not understand all that I heard. I felt as if there were such peace, and holiness, and Christian kindness in that quiet home-church, where young and old, and rich and poor, gathered to hear God's truth, and pray

and praise together. And Holdich himself is such a good man," continued Edith warmly: "it is not merely that he does not mind openly confessing his religion—whatever people may think of it—but that he lives up to what he professes. Papa went on the Continent, you know, rather in haste, and there had been a little confusion in his affairs, and no time to set them right. Papa was always so generous, and those about him had abused his confidence so sadly."

"Yes, I heard something of that," observed Isa, who, like the rest of the world, was aware that Sir Digby's ostentatious extravagance had plunged him into pecuniary difficulties, and that change of air for his invalid child though the ostensible, had not been the only cause of his retreat.

"But Holdich has brought everything into such beautiful order," continued Edith, "he has quite surprised Papa by the way in which he has managed the estate. He has cared for his master's interests as much, I think *more* than if they had been his own. Papa used to suspect people who had the name of being very pious, but he said this morning at breakfast, 'A man like my steward, who brings his Christianity into his daily dealings, does more to convince infidels of the real power of faith than all the learned books that ever were written.' I treasured up the words to repeat them to Holdich's wife. I think that she and her husband are the

happiest people that I know, and especially now that their son is doing so well as a schoolmaster under Mr. Eardley."

"The subject of the new series of cottage-lectures is to be Gideon's triumph over Midian," observed Isa.

"And the first is to begin at 7 this evening," said Edith. "Papa has given me leave to be always present—at least when the weather is fine; and some of our servants will go too. They are not all able to get to church on Sundays, for Axe is five miles from the castle."

The cousins, slowly sauntering up the avenue, had now reached a grassy mound at the end of it, on which a tall weather-cock stood, and which might be ascended by a flight of marble steps. Having mounted these steps, a very extensive and beautiful prospect lay before Isa and Edith, while a rural seat invited them to rest and enjoy it.

"I have looked upon many lovely views in Italy," observed Edith, as her eye wandered with delight over the scene; "but to my mind, there is none to compare with this. I always missed that dear little spire seen in the distance yonder, where I knew that Sunday after Sunday the real truth was preached in my own native tongue by a servant of God. It always seems to me with Mr. Eardley as if he were like the disciples, who went to their Master and had their directions in the morning straight from His

lips; and that in the evening, when his labour was over, he would go and 'tell Jesus' all that he had done, and all that he had tried to do—receive the Lord's smile and His blessing, and then lie down to rest at his feet."

"It seems so with some clergymen," said Isa. "When they feed the people with the bread of the Word, we feel that they have just taken it from the hands of the Lord—that He has given thanks, and blessed, and broken it; so that we look from the servant to the Master, and realize that the ministry of the Gospel is hallowed service indeed."

CHAPTER II.

BROKEN BUBBLES.

"SO you especially enjoyed your stay at Florence," said Isa, after the conversation had taken a less serious turn.

"I was very happy there, it was so beautiful, and we knew such very nice people. I should have liked to have stayed there much longer."

"And why did you not remain there?" asked Isa; "did not Sir Digby enjoy Florence too?"

"Very much indeed, until—until a lady came to stay there who spoilt all his pleasure in the place."

"How was that?" said Isa.

"Why, the lady was witty; at least people said so; but if her kind of talking was wit, I wish that there were no such thing in the world. All her delight seemed to be to gossip and make her friends merry; and so long as they laughed, she did not much mind what they laughed at. You see," continued Edith in a confidential tone, "her mother had lived in the Castle, and she talked a great deal about that. Now, of course, it was quite right and noble in Papa to let strangers come here while we

were away—and there had been difficulties, as you know—but he did not like its being talked about to every one."

Isa could easily comprehend that her proud uncle had been very sensitive on the subject of the letting of his ancestral mansion.

"And then," pursued Edith, "she mixed up what was true with what was not true; and how could strangers tell whether she spoke in jest or in earnest? She said that Papa had been harsh and violent to his servants; and that was shamefully false!" exclaimed the girl, with a flush of indignation on the face usually so gentle and calm—"he had been only too indulgent and trustful. In short, this lady made Florence so unpleasant by her gossip, that Papa could bear it no longer. He said that he would never willingly be for a day in the same city with Cora Madden."

"Cora Madden!" repeated Isa, with a little start; and Edith, who had been looking up at her cousin, saw with surprise a stern, gloomy expression pass over her countenance like a shadow.

"Do you know Miss Madden?" inquired the baronet's daughter.

"Do I know her?" repeated Isa slowly, with her hazel eyes bent on the ground. Then suddenly she raised them, as she uttered the abrupt question, "Edith, do you know what it is to hate?"

"Hate? no, not exactly," replied the gentle girl;

" but there are some persons whom I do not like at all—some with whom I feel angry at times. I was angry with Miss Madden one day when she was laughing at Mr. Eardley, and mimicking his manner. I thought her doing so was so silly, so wrong. Besides, rudeness to one's friends tries one's patience a great deal more than unkindness to one's self."

" Cora reminds me of the description of the wicked in the Psalms," observed Isa—" ' *They shoot out their arrows, even bitter words.*' She cares little where the darts alight, or how deep they may pierce."

Edith, who had a very tender conscience, was very doubtful whether such an application of a text from Scripture was consistent with Christian charity. Without venturing, however, to reprove, she merely observed in her gentle tone, " I am sorry that I spoke of Cora at all. It was breaking a rule which I had made."

" What is your rule?" asked Isa.

" Never to speak of those whom I cannot like, except to God," replied Edith.

" And what do you say of them to God?"

" Oh, if I speak *of* them to God, I must speak *for* them," answered little Edith; " I dare not do anything else, for the Lord has told us to love our enemies, and we could not bring malice into our prayers."

" Yours is a good rule, darling," said Isa, and she turned to imprint a kiss on the forehead of her

cousin. "Let us speak no more of Cora Madden, and may God help us to obey the most difficult command contained in all the Bible!"

To explain why the command appeared such a hard one to the young maiden—why the very name of Cora called up bitter remembrances to her mind—it is needful that I should let the reader know something of the previous history of Isa Gritton.

Like her cousin Edith, Isa had early lost her mother, and had been the only daughter in her father's home; but otherwise there had been little resemblance between the early childhood of the two. Edith, a crippled, suffering invalid, had been the unmurmuring victim of nursery oppression, and in her splendid mansion had had more to endure than many of the children of the poor. Isa, on the contrary, fondly tended by a devoted nurse, herself strong, vigorous, and full of spirits, had found her childhood flow pleasantly past, like a stream dimpling in sunshine and bordered with flowers. Isa had scarcely known what it was to feel weary, sick, or sad. Her father called her his little lark, made only to sing and to soar. She was beloved by all who knew the bright, playful child, and her affectionate nature disposed her to love all in return. The religion which was carefully instilled into Isa partook of the joyful character of her mind. Isa was troubled by no doubts and few fears. The thoughts of heaven and bliss which were suggested to her,

were congenial to the spirit of the child. Isa looked forward to the joys of Paradise without letting imagination dwell either on the dark valley or "the narrow stream." Her idea of death was simply a peaceful removal to a yet brighter and happier home.

There were some spiritual dangers attending this existence of ease and joy. The very sweetness of Isa's disposition dimmed her perception of inward corruption. If she was tempted to make an idol of self, it was an idol so fair that she scarcely recognised it as one. Sometimes, indeed, Isa's conscience would accuse her of vanity as she lingered before her mirror, surveying with girlish pleasure the smiling image within it, or recalled words of fond admiration, or committed some little extravagance in regard to dress, for Isa at that time had a weakness for dress. But the accusation was made in a whisper so soft, that it scarcely disturbed her serenity. It affected her conduct, however, for on the day when Isa first received a regular allowance of her own, she made on her knees a resolution which never was broken—not to spend money on the adornment of her person without devoting an equal sum to the relief of the poor. Thus early the love of God combated the love of the world; a bridle was placed upon vanity, which was still but a bridle of flowers; for Isa felt as much pleasure in helping the poor as in wearing the new robe, or in clasping the jewelled bracelet round her soft white arm.

Isa's brightness of spirit did not pass away with childhood, it rather increased as the bud expands into the perfect flower. But in life's school Providence has appointed various teachers, and few of God's children pass many years upon earth without coming under the discipline of disappointment, bereavement, and care. Isa was to know all three. The first came to her when the blooming girl felt herself at the very summit of earthly bliss, when a halo of happiness was thrown around every object near her. Isa believed herself to be the most blest of women in being beloved by Lionel Madden. Young and inexperienced as she was, Isa's fancy invested her hero with every noble and sterling quality, she believed all that she desired, and the bright bubbles blown by hope glittered with all the prismatic tints of the rainbow. The bubble suddenly broke! Lionel became cold, alienated, shortly after the arrival of his sister, who seemed to have taken an instinctive dislike to Isa. What had been said against her Isa never exactly knew; but whatever poisoned shaft had destroyed her hopes, she knew that it came from the quiver of Cora. What marvel if bitter, resentful feelings arose towards the author of her deep, though hidden, anguish? As Isa's gaiety was suddenly changed into gloom, so her kindly loving nature for awhile seemed altered into one sternly vindictive. Like Satan intruding in a paradise of peace, and blighting its flowers by his

presence, hatred, and even a lurking desire for vengeance, suddenly arose in a soul which had previously appeared to be formed only for happiness and love.

But had Cora really injured Isa? Nay; the malicious enemy had done more to shield the young maiden from misfortune than her most tender friend could have done. Cruel may be the hand which tears to pieces the half-formed nest which a bird is building on a hedge by the wayside, but it is well for the bird if it be thus constrained to choose a higher and safer bough. Lionel was unworthy of the affection of a faithful, confiding young heart. It was well for Isa that her bubble was broken, that her cherished hopes were scattered to the winds. She did not think so, she could not feel so; even Lionel's very worldly marriage, which took place a few months afterwards, did not fully open her eyes to this truth. Isa deemed all that was unworthy in the conduct of young Madden the result of the influence of his sister; and regarded Cora not only as her own evil genius, but that of the man whom she had loved. Startled and alarmed by the fierce passions which, for the first time, struggled for the possession of her heart, Isa looked upon Cora as the cause not only of misery but of sin also. Isa's self-knowledge was deepened by trial, but it was a self-knowledge that mortified and pained her. She found that she was far from what she had hoped to

become, from what the world believed her to be, she was no calm angel soaring above earth and its trials, but a weak tempted woman, who found it hard not to murmur, and almost impossible truly to forgive.

And yet Cora had been but an instrument in a higher Hand, and to Isa an instrument for good. We may praise God in another world even more for the malice of our bitter enemies, than for the tender love of our friends. Jacob's paternal affection would have shielded his best-beloved son from every touch of misfortune; but it was the hatred of Joseph's brethren, the malice of his false accuser, that led him—through the pit and the prison—to exaltation and to honour. Satan himself became, through God's over-ruling goodness, an instrument of blessing to Job; his cruel assaults led to deeper experience in the man whom he sought to destroy, more close communion with God, and doubtless more exalted blessedness hereafter. No enemy, human or infernal, has power to do us aught but *good*, except by leading us into sin. Could we realize this, our wounded hearts might find it less difficult to forgive the wrongs which are "blessings in disguise."

Not a year after the stroke of disappointment had fallen upon Isa, she had to endure that of sudden bereavement. A few—very few—days of anxious watching by a parent's sick-bed, and Isa found herself fatherless as well as motherless in the world. Very heavy lay the burden of loneliness upon the

young orphan's heart. It is true that Isa had a half-brother yet living, but Gaspar was many years older than herself, and Isa had seen very little of him, as the greater part of his life had been passed in Jamaica. Still the affections of Isa clung fondly around the nearest relative left for her to love, especially as she knew her brother to be in broken health; and she resolved that to watch over him and minister to his comfort should be the object thenceforth of an existence from which all the brightness appeared to have departed.

Even with thoughts of Gaspar, however, were linked associations of mystery and pain. Isa had never imparted to any one a care which to her young spirit was more oppressive than sorrow itself. She had never told how, when the shadow of approaching dissolution lay on her father, when the delirium of fever had passed away, he had fixed his glazing eyes upon his daughter, at that midnight hour the sole watcher beside him. The dying man had seemed anxious to disburden himself of something that weighed on his mind; he struggled to speak, but his parched lips could scarcely frame articulate words. Isa strained her ear to catch the almost inaudible accents, bending down so low that she could feel the dying man's breath on her cheek. A few scattered sentences were gathered, deeply imprinted on her memory by the solemnity of the time when they were uttered.

"Gaspar—you will be with him—something wrong—the *Orissa*—not her money lost—he should deal fairly by that orphan—tell him from me—" but whatever was the message intended, death silenced the lips that would have sent it, and Isa was left to ponder painfully over what could be "wrong," and how Gaspar could have not "dealt fairly" by an orphan, at least in the opinion of his father.

The remembrance of these dying words, the dread of some painful explanation with Gaspar, alone threw a damp upon the earnest desire with which Isa looked forward to her only brother's return to England. Her affectionate spirit yearned for the sympathy of one bound to her by the tie of blood, and she longed once more to possess a settled home. About a year after Mr. Gritton's death, Gaspar arrived from Jamaica. Isa was at the time residing with a friend in London, and her brother took a lodging near her. Being a good deal occupied with business during the day, and too much an invalid to venture out in the evening, Gaspar did not see much of his sister, far less than Isa desired. Her brother's manner towards her was gentle and courteous, his kindness won her gratitude, his broken health her sympathy. Isa wished to devote herself to the care of her brother, but he preferred delaying the time when they should reside together in a settled home, until he should have built a house into which he could

receive his young sister. During this period spent in London, Isa either found no opportunity of speaking to Gaspar on the subject of their father's mysterious message, or she put off making the effort till a more quiet season, when her brother might have recovered his health. She could not bear to risk exciting him when he was so delicate, or offending him when he was so kind. Isa gladly availed herself of any excuse to delay the performance of a duty from which she intuitively shrank.

Isa felt grateful to her half-brother for selecting as the place of their future residence a spot near Castle Lestrange. She had paid many a delightful visit to her uncle's lordly mansion, both before and after the death of his wife, and she deemed it a proof of Gaspar's considerate affection for herself, that he should purchase a site for his house but a mile from the dwelling of those who were her relatives, but not his own. Isa could have wished, indeed, that it had not been on the Wildwaste side of the Castle, as memory recalled a flat expanse of common surrounding a miserable hamlet, and an unsightly manufactory; but she had not visited her uncle's home for nearly six years, and many changes might have taken place during that period. Isa also encouraged herself with the thought that a little paradise might stand even in the midst of a barren heath, like an oasis in a desert, and that as Gaspar had chosen to build a house instead of buy-

ing one, it was evident that his was a taste which could not be satisfied by any ordinary attractions in a dwelling.

During the time when Gaspar was building, Isa never once saw her brother. He took a lodging above the single shop in Wildwaste, that he might superintend operations. He kept a sharp eye over the workmen who were brought from London, not suffering them, it was said, to mix with the cottagers around, or spend their evenings at the small county inn. There was no doubt that Gaspar Gritton was eccentric, and Isa was aware of the fact; but she was disposed to look at her only brother in the most favourable light, and persuaded herself that she rather liked a dash of eccentricity in a character, it redeemed it from being commonplace.

Isa was very impatient for the completion of her new home, and would, if permitted, have entered it before it was sufficiently dry to be a safe residence for her. Buoyant hope had again sprung up within her young heart, long cast down, but not crushed by affliction. Life might yet have joys in store for the bright girl. Isa would be, as she thought, everything to her brother; his nurse, companion, and friend. She would make his home a fairy dwelling, where everything on which the eye might rest should be graceful and pretty. Isa knew that her brother had sufficient means to procure every comfort; and though her own patrimony was but slender, she

hoped, dispensing Gaspar's alms, to become a benefactress to all the poor around them. Again the fairy bubble was glittering before Isa, and if its colours were now less splendid, and it rose to less lofty a height, still the emblem of earthly hope was not without its beauty and brightness.

It was on a day in March that Isa joined her brother. She had enjoyed her journey by train; the sunshine had been brilliant, her companions agreeable, and her mind was full of pleasant expectation. Isa's pleasure was damped by the little disappointment of not finding Gaspar ready to welcome her at the station. It was with a sensation of loneliness that she took her seat in a hired open conveyance to be driven to Wildwaste Lodge. The sunshine was now overclouded, a fierce north-east wind was blowing, from the chilling effects of which the young lady from London tried to protect herself in vain. The horse was lame, the drive seemed long.

"Are we far from Wildwaste Lodge?" asked Isa at last of the driver, as they skirted a dreary common of which she fancied that she could recognise some of the features.

"That be's the house," replied the man, pointing with his whip towards a narrow three-storied dwelling, looking staringly new, without sheltering shrubbery or even hedge, with no blinds to the windows, no porch to the door, nothing that could redeem its aspect from absolute vulgarity. Could

this be the rural retreat to which Isa had given the name of home!

Disheartened and chilled felt Isa as her conveyance passed through the wretched hamlet, where groups of untidy women and barefooted children stood staring at the unwonted apparition of anything in the shape of a carriage. She scarcely liked to look again at the house, as the lame horse stopped at the dark green door. Gaspar did not come forth to welcome her; he dared not face the cutting wind which had chilled his sister to the heart. Cold and numbed after her journey, Isa—when a deaf elderly woman had answered the knock—descended from the conveyance; herself saw her boxes carried into the narrow hall by the driver, paid the man and dismissed him, and then hastened into the parlour, where she found her brother. His reception, though not uncourteous, was by no means calculated to dispel the chill which had fallen on the spirits of Isa. Gaspar was so full of his own complaints that he had scarcely leisure to observe that his sister was tired and cold. After conversing with him for a while, Isa arose to explore the other apartments of the house. She suppressed a little sigh of disappointment as she ascended the uncarpeted stair.

The interior of Wildwaste Lodge was, if possible, more unattractive than its outward appearance. Gaspar had reserved the ground-floor for himself, and no one had a right to complain if in his own

peculiar domain he preferred simplicity to ornament, and neglected the little elegancies which Isa deemed almost essential to comfort. But Isa was deeply mortified when she entered her own apartments, which were immediately over those of her brother, and found them furnished with a regard to economy which amounted to actual penuriousness. A few chairs, not one of which matched another, and which seemed to have been chosen at hap-hazard out of some broker's shop; a table of painted wood, one of the legs of which did not touch the uncarpeted floor; and a shelf to serve as a bookcase: these formed the entire furniture of the young lady's boudoir. There was not so much as a curtain to the window. Isa, weary and chilled after her journey, felt inclined to sit down and cry from mortification and disappointment. Little joy could she anticipate from a life to be passed with one who from the first showed such disregard for her pleasure and comfort.

Isa's misgivings were painfully realized. There are some persons who are pleasing in society, agreeable when only met on casual occasions, with whom it is very annoying to be brought into closer contact. It is trying to the temper to transact business with them, still more trying to dwell under the same roof. The character of such persons seems to be made up of angles, that on every side chafe and annoy. A graphic writer * has humorously described them as

* *Vide* "Autumn Holidays of a Country Parson."

unpruned trees. "Little odd habits, the rudiments of worse habits, need every now and then to be cut off and corrected. We should all grow very singular, ridiculous, and unamiable creatures but for the pruning we have got from hands kind and unkind, from our earliest days. . . . . Perhaps you have known a man who has lived for forty years alone; and you know what odd shoots he had sent out; what strange traits and habits he had acquired; what singular little ways he had got into. There had been no one at home to prune him, and the little shoots of eccentricity, of vanity, of vain self-estimation, that might have easily been cut off when they were green and soft, have now grown into rigidity."

Mr. Gritton, from living much alone, had become a man of this kind. The most unsightly branch on the unpruned tree was that of penuriousness. Isa had had little opportunity of knowing her brother's infirmity until, when she became a resident in his house, it affected her daily, her hourly comfort. Herself generous and open-handed, fond of having the conveniences and elegancies of life around her, yet esteeming as the greatest of luxuries the power of giving freely to others, Isa could not understand, far less sympathize, with the love of money, for money's sake, which was the leading characteristic of Gaspar. It seemed to her so grovelling, so mean, that Isa had to struggle against emotions not only of irritation but of contempt. She was also deeply

wounded to find that Gaspar's affection for his only sister was so subordinate to his avarice. The young lady, accustomed to luxury and refinement, had the utmost difficulty in persuading her brother even to allow her to find an assistant to the ill-tempered elderly woman whom he had engaged as a general servant. Though Isa succeeded in gaining her point, Mr. Gritton would only give such wages as would be accepted by none but an inexperienced girl like Lottie Stone. The efforts which it cost Isa to carry out even this small domestic arrangement, made her aware of another unpleasant fact, that Gaspar had a peevish, irritable temper, more trying to one residing constantly with him than a passionate one would have been. The dying charge of her father lay now like an oppressive weight upon the heart of poor Isa; her new insight into the character of Gaspar gave to their parent's words a more forcible meaning, and she dreaded more and more the idea of being compelled by a sense of duty to open the subject to her brother.

The first weeks of Isa's residence at her dreary home would have been weeks of positive misery, but for the cheering prospect of the speedy return of her uncle and cousin, and the comfort which she derived from the visits of the pastor of Axe, whose fatherly interest in her young servant had first led his steps to her dwelling. Smiling April came at last, and with it—more welcome to Isa than the nightingale's song—Edith Lestrange returned to the Castle. It

was now arranged that Isa should pass with her cousin a portion of each of those days on which an evening lecture should be held at the steward's cottage, and return to Wildwaste in the baronet's carriage at night. It was something to Isa to be thus sure of at least two pleasant days in the week, though the contrast between the refined elegance of Edith's home, and the dreary discomfort of her own, increased the sense of bitterness in the soul of Isa.

But that sense of bitterness seemed for a time to pass away, and domestic trials to be forgotten, when the cousins entered together the flower-covered porch of the dwelling of Holdich, to unite with their poorer brethren in the simple cottage-service. Edith's heart was overflowing with thankful delight at being permitted again to worship in that place where some of her earliest impressions of religion had been received. Isa felt that here at least the carking cares of life might be shut out; she might lift up her soul, as in happier days, unto her Father in heaven.

The subject chosen by Mr. Eardley was the history of the triumph of Gideon, the hero and saint, over the hosts of Midian. It was his object in this, as in former courses of lectures,* to draw simple practical lessons from the narratives contained in the Word of God; and as such lessons are required by us all, I shall weave the brief addresses of the clergyman, though in separate chapters, into the web of my story.

* *Vide* "The Shepherd of Bethlehem," "Exiles in Babylon," and "Rescued from Egypt."

CHAPTER III.

LECTURE I.

MIDIANITES IN POSSESSION.

FOR forty years after Deborah had celebrated the triumph over Sisera in her glorious song, the land of Israel had had rest. This period of tranquillity receives such brief mention in the Scriptures, that we are in danger of forgetting for how long a time God granted the blessing of peace. And thus is it in our own lives, my brethren: times of trouble stand out as it were like rugged crags, shutting out from memory's view the vines and the fig-trees, the olive-yards, the green pastures and still waters, with which our gracious God for long may have blessed us.

Seven years of trouble to Israel succeeded the forty years of repose. Not *causeless* trouble, such is never known in the experience either of Israelite or of Christian, but we do not always search out the actual cause of affliction. With God's ancient people the punishment was clearly traced to the sin. When the Midianites, like a swarm of locusts, came up against them, destroying and wasting, driving the

inhabitants of the land to hide in dens of the mountains, strongholds, and caves, it was because the stain of idolatry lay upon Israel, and mercy, to save the sinners, required that justice should chastise the sin.

The Midianites, who were thus made an instrument of punishment to Israel, were, like themselves, descendants of Abraham, but by his union with Keturah. When Moses guided God's people towards Canaan, the Midianites drew down vengeance on themselves by their too successful efforts to lead Israel into sin. Then perished the wicked prophet Balaam amongst the enemies of God's people. But Midian, though punished, had not been destroyed, and now—after the lapse of nearly two hundred years—we find it a very powerful nation, against whose numerous hordes the Israelites seem to have made no attempt to defend their homes, so completely was the warlike spirit crushed in the descendants of those who had triumphed under Moses and Joshua when they fought the battles of the Lord.

When the Israelites were in trouble, then they cried aloud to the God of their fathers, and He heard and answered their prayer. Not yet by sending a deliverer; the sense of sin must be deepened before the judgment be removed. A prophet was sent to the people, with a message not of promise but of reproof.

"Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I brought

you up from Egypt, and brought you forth from the land of bondage, and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all that oppressed you, and drave them out from before you, and gave you their land. And I said unto you, I am the Lord your God; fear not the gods of the Amorites in whose land ye dwell; but ye have not obeyed My voice."

The great and glorious deliverance of Israel from Egypt we may regard as a type of the redemption of Christ's Church from the dominion of Satan,—the triumph achieved once and for ever by the mysterious sufferings of our Saviour, His sacrifice offered upon the Cross. This is the *central truth* of the Christian religion. But though Egyptian darkness be left behind, though Christians be received into the enjoyment of privileges purchased by the death of their Lord, their backslidings, like those of Israel, often draw upon them heavy troubles, resembling the devouring hordes of Midian.

I am not, my brethren, speaking of the afflictions and bereavements which are the common lot of all. During the forty years of blessed peace, sickness and sorrow must have been known in homes of Israel, and faithful servants of God have wept over new-made graves. Such trials are crosses appointed by a heavenly Father, crosses which each and all must take up at some period of life, if life be not early cut short. But I am speaking of troubles directly or

indirectly brought on us by our sins; the Midianites who destroy our peace, and bring upon us miseries, from which more earnest faith, more perfect obedience might have preserved us. We are accustomed to speak of this life as "a vale of tears," but let us search and examine whether the valley owe not the greater part of its desolation and gloom to foes to our peace whom *we might have kept out*, and over whom faith may yet give us a victory glorious as that of Gideon.

To explain my meaning more clearly, let me draw your attention to a few of what we may call chiefs —leaders of hordes of troubles, Midianites in the heart, that trample down our happiness, and destroy our comfort in life. I shall mention four names but too familiar,—Disappointment, Discontent, Dissension, Distrust. Let us see whether the sufferings which they inflict are not more severe and perpetual than those brought upon us by what are called visitations of Providence,—whether many griefs which we term "crosses" are not rather burdens laid upon us by enemies to the soul, to whose yoke we should never have stooped.

The first Midianite chief whom I shall bring before you is Disappointment, the intruder who cuts down the green crop of hope, and leaves a famine in the soul. Whence is it that even the Christian is constantly subject to disappointment? Is it not from habitual disobedience to the divine command, *Set*

your affections upon things above, not on things beneath? We eagerly fix our heart on some worldly object,—ambition, pleasure, or gain; like children we build our houses of delight on the sand within reach of the tide, which must sooner or later sweep them away, and then sit down and weep when the flood rolls over the spot which we had unwisely chosen. Let each of us who in the bitterness of disappointment has mournfully repeated the words of the Preacher, *Vanity of vanities, all is vanity,* see whether the idol in the heart has not been the cause of the Midianites' invasion, and whether that faith which builds on the Rock of Ages, beyond the reach of desolation or decay, may not yet overcome the power of disappointment to harass the soul. Hopes fixed upon Christ know not disappointment; treasures laid up in heaven can never be lost; ties formed by faith endure throughout eternity; the less our joys are of the earth earthy, the less danger there is that the spoiler can ever wrest them away from our grasp.

And whence cometh Discontent, who robs his slave of all his peace—for peace and discontent cannot abide in the same soul. Can he who says to his most bountiful God, not only with his lips but from his heart, "I am unworthy of the least of Thy mercies," ever know discontent? Must not the peevish, envious, rebellious spirit be ever kept far from his gates? We should deem so,—and yet, Christian brethren, do we practically find that it

is so? Are we not too often inclined to compare our lot with that of others, and if not openly, yet secretly repine, as if Providence had done us a wrong? No true servant of Christ can desire to have his portion here; and yet, does not the inheritor of Heaven too frequently murmur because not all the good things of earth are showered upon him in addition? How different his spirit from that of the apostle! He who had *suffered the loss of all things*, yet could affirm, *I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content.* Had we also learned this lesson, we should find it less impracticable to obey his command, *Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say unto you, rejoice.*

"You have not your due," were the words which I once heard a wife address to a husband who had been deprived of some advantage which she considered to have been his right. "Nay, God be praised that I have not my *due*," he replied. "What is my *due* as a sinner before God? what is my due from a world which I have renounced for His sake? Had I chosen my portion in this life, then only might I complain of not receiving my due!" Here was a man whom discontent could not rob of his heritage of peace.

To pass on to Dissension, the third enemy to our happiness, who invades many a home, and makes goodly dwellings miserable abodes,—to what shall we trace his invasion? Is it not written in Scripture, *By pride cometh contention?*—would not the

soft answer that *turneth away wrath* often prove as a strong bar to keep him from entering our habitations? But here I must guard myself from being misunderstood. It is possible that dissension may come where the fault lies on one side alone. The Christian may be—not unfrequently is—called to brave opposition, and draw upon himself the anger of men by defending the truth, or taking up the cause of the oppressed. The command, *live peaceably with all men*, is qualified by *if it be possible;* for in some cases it is *not* possible to preserve harmony without giving up principle. Under such circumstances the sacrifice of peace is a sacrifice for God, and the cross is one which is borne for His sake. But in the majority of cases dissension follows on the footsteps of pride, and is the leader of malice, hatred, and all uncharitableness. Then, indeed, is he the true Midianite who pours gall into the very springs of enjoyment, who casts his venomed arrows on every side, and maketh a wilderness of that which might have been as the Garden of Eden. *Better a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.* Could we, through the grace of God's Spirit, purge from our souls all malice, all bitterness and wrath—could we love one another as Christ hath loved us, what heart-burnings, what heart-achings might be spared, and how often would the brightness of heaven appear to be reflected even upon earth!

Disappointment, Discontent, and Dissension have, as we have seen, much to do with the train of sorrows which have given to God's fair world the name of "a vale of tears." But I believe that the most dangerous enemy of all to our peace, the one who has most often pressed his iron yoke on the hearts of my hearers, is the fourth whose name I have mentioned, Distrust of the love and wisdom of God. This assertion may cause surprise in those who are unconscious of a doubt; but examine yourselves closely, my brethren, observe what has most often clouded your brows, saddened your spirits, drawn the deep sigh from your hearts. Has it been regrets for the past? Has it been the trials of the present? Has it not rather been care for the future, fears of what the morrow might bring? Would not perfect obedience to the injunction of our blessed Redeemer, *Take no thought for the morrow*, sweep away at once more than half of the troubles that weigh on our souls?

And why take thought for the morrow? We too often appear to forget that the future lies in the hand of One "too wise to err, too good to be unkind." We act as if we could not, or would not, believe that *all things work together for good to them that love God:* we are needlessly restless, anxious, unhappy, and exclaim in our trouble, "How heavy a rod the Lord lays upon me!" Nay, poor weak unbelieving heart, thou art smitten less by the rod of

thy Father, than by the scourge of the Midianite within. If faith could drive out mistrust, if thou couldst in deed and in truth cast thy cares upon Him who careth for thee, then—even here—might God give thee *beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.* Perfect trust would bring perfect submission, and the peace that passeth understanding.

Gideon, the future deliverer of Israel, first appears before us in Scripture engaged in threshing corn beside the wine-press, in order to hide it from the rapacious Midianites who held possession of the land. From the necessity of concealment he cannot employ, after the custom of the East, his father's oxen to trample out the wheat; he must himself wield the flail with the strength of his own right arm. Gideon is employed in a task of lowly toil, unconscious at first of the presence of the heavenly Being who has descended to earth, and who is now beside him under the shadow of the oak at Ophrah. And here for the present we will pause, and defer till our next meeting the consideration of God's merciful promise to Gideon, and the effect which it produced on his soul. If we regard Faith under the emblem of a tree, we have hitherto viewed it as such tree may appear in winter, when there is not a blossom on the bough or a leaf on the spray. There is no outward evidence of life; and though we hope that spring will draw up the sap, and clothe the bare branches with beauty,

we see no present sign of the change. Such may have been the state of Gideon's faith when he thought on the sufferings of his miserable country. The flail of the Lord was upon it, but we know from the result that it was not to crush—not to destroy the wheat, but to separate the chaff from the grain, and so render the latter more fit for reception into the garner of the Lord.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LITTLE MAID.

"GOOD-BYE, Isa dearest, we shall often—very often meet," were the parting words of Edith that night.

Wrapped up warmly for protection from the cold air, Isa descended the steps beneath the lofty portico of the Castle, and entered the luxurious carriage which her uncle had placed at her command. As she sank on the soft cushions, a dreary, aching sensation came over her heart; she felt as if she were leaving brightness, happiness, beauty behind her, and going to an abode of trial—almost privation—which she could hardly regard as a home.

"It is wrong, very wrong in me to feel thus," Isa murmured to herself. "If visits to the Castle make me discontented, the fewer they are the better; but it seems to me that my only happy time now will be the time spent with Edith. I have nothing at the Castle to wear my spirits, or chafe my temper, my cousin is so sweet, my uncle so kind,—when under their roof I seem to be able to shut out disappointment and care. Ah! that word disappointment, it

reminds me of the cottage-lecture which I heard this evening. Are the Midianites in possession of my heart? Are my crosses—what I have deemed crosses—rather burdens laid upon me by enemies, under whose yoke I should never have stooped?"

As the carriage rolled on through the darkness, Isa pursued the train of her reflections. Disappointment, Discontent, Dissension, Distrust, the Midianites in the soul—was she now harbouring them in her own? Isa could not bear to let her mind dwell long upon the first; even now, after the lapse of years, when she had had too good cause to believe that the idol which she had raised in her heart had been of clay, Isa dare hardly own to herself that Lionel had been unworthy of her love, and that his love had not been enduring, because it had contained no element of immortality. Shrinking from close self-examination on a subject so tender, Isa passed on to that of Discontent; painfully aware as she was that that spirit was struggling within her breast, that she was tempted to regard her present lot with emotions of bitterness amounting almost to rebellion.

"Saints have been content in poverty, serene in suffering, joyful in tribulation,—they have made even dungeon-walls echo to their hymns of praise," thought Isa, "and here am I, with youth, health, competence, kind friends, blessings unnumbered and undeserved, —here am I, cast down, irritable, murmuring, and depressed, because I dwell in a house which does

not suit my taste, but which is a thousand times more comfortable than those inhabited by most of my poor fellow-creatures. I am annoyed at a little petulance from an invalid brother, while many, better than myself, have to endure harshness amounting to cruelty, hatred, persecution, and scorn. How have I merited that my trials should be so much lighter than theirs? Have I any cause to murmur? have I any right to complain? Is it well that I should compare my lot with that of the few, instead of that of the many, and give place to ungrateful discontent instead of thanking God that He has bestowed upon me so much more than my due? Why should my thoughts dwell on Edith's happiness instead of on the misery that I see yet nearer to me in the squalid homes of Wildwaste? I must go more amongst the poor; yes, in so doing I shall not only obey God's command, but find weapons against the intrusion of sinful discontent.

"Dissension! I can scarcely say that there is that in my home, though there is, I fear, but little of true affection; and words of impatience and looks of coldness make life's road seem very rough!" The simile was probably suggested to Isa's mind by the jolting motion of the carriage, for the smooth gravel drive through the baronet's grounds was now exchanged for the rough road across the common, which was seldom traversed except by the carts, which had left deep ruts in the boggy soil. "But

what was the cause of that intensely bitter feeling which arose to-day—which always arises in my mind at the bare mention of Cora Madden? Why should the remembrance of her be sufficient to drive away the holiest and happiest thoughts? Surely the Midianites are within,. hatred, malice—nay, I almost fear the spirit of revenge! I sometimes feel such an intense—such an unholy longing for retribution to come upon that woman, that she should taste some of the bitterness of the cup of misery which she has caused me to drink! And are such longings consistent with Christianity? do they not arise from the influence of the spirit of evil? While such emotions are harboured in my heart, can there ever be peace within? God help me, for my strength is as weakness against such a Midianite as this!

"And Distrust"—here Isa's meditations were suddenly brought to a close by her arrival at Wild-waste Lodge. The loud, authoritative knock which broke in such an unusual manner the stillness which had pervaded that dull tenement brought Lottie Stone running in haste to the door. She was a shy, black-eyed little maiden, who looked up in timid awe at Sir Digby's tall footman in his splendid livery, but greeted her young mistress with a smile of rustic simplicity.

"Has your master gone to rest yet?" asked Isa.

"Not yet, he's a-waiting for you in the study."

Isa entered her brother's almost unfurnished apart-

ment. One dull candle threw faint light on bare walls, and a table and chairs that would have looked shabby in a farm-house. On one of the latter (there were but three) was seated Gaspar Gritton. He was a man still in the prime of life, but the sallow complexion and stoop consequent on protracted ill health, made him look several years older than he in reality was. Gaspar had been rather handsome in youth, and still his features, though contracted, were good; but his eye was dull, and the whole expression of his face unpleasing: it was marked by dissatisfaction and peevishness, and more so than usual as Isa entered his study.

"I wish that you would tell those fellows not to startle one by such thundering raps," said the invalid brother.

"I am sorry that the knock disturbed you, its loudness was certainly disproportioned to the occasion," replied Isa, good-humouredly, as she seated herself by her brother; "I will tell John to announce my return in a more modest manner next time."

"I don't know why you should come in a carriage at all. You might have walked home with Lottie and Mrs. Bolder after the meeting was over; the night is perfectly fine. I expected you before half-past 8, and now it is almost 11." Gaspar took a pinch of snuff to soothe his aggrieved feelings, this being the sole luxury in which he habitually indulged; his

doing so happened unfortunately to be particularly disagreeable to Isa.

"My uncle kindly wished me to stay the evening with himself and Edith, and to pass every day on which lectures are given with them at the Castle," said Isa.

"Gadding—always gadding; girls are never satisfied at home," observed Gaspar with a sneer.

Isa felt irritated and inclined to make a retort, but she suppressed the words on her tongue, and replied as cheerfully as she could,—"You cannot wonder at my liking to meet with some of my nearest relations, and were I to see absolutely nothing beyond our Wildwaste domain, I might grow as antiquated and whimsical as Robinson Crusoe himself. But I fear that you have passed but a dull evening without Isa to sing or read to you, Gaspar."

The ungracious brother made no reply; he only applied again to his little brown box.

"Sir Digby asked me if you would not join his circle," continued Isa; "but I told him that you did not yet venture to expose yourself to the night air. Was I right? You will, of course, call upon him some morning; you will find him a pleasant acquaintance."

"I'm not hunting after acquaintances; I've neither health nor spirits for society," replied Gaspar, rising languidly from his chair; "and as for these grandees

of the Castle, I should not find them much in *my* line, however much they may be in yours."

The brother and sister, after a cold "good-night," retired to their several apartments, Isa asking herself as she ascended the chilly staircase whether it were his fault or her own that she was disappointed in Gaspar.

She found her little servant Lottie awaiting her in her room, ready to perform the offices of lady's maid, in which the young rustic took great pride and pleasure. Lottie Stone was a source of amusement as well as of interest to Isa; in her simplicity and ignorance she was so utterly unlike any of her class whom the lady had met with before. The girl, painfully shy before strangers, had a naive frankness with her young mistress, which was almost like the confidence of a child. Isa by no means discouraged this confidence, which gave her much influence over the young being placed under her care. The rustic knew little of manners, and was once detected in the act of snuffing the candle with her fingers. Isa in vain tried to teach her to understand the thermometer by which the valetudinarian regulated the heat of his room, and seemed to have no idea of the difference between hot weather and cold. Gaspar used angrily to declare that Lottie was certain to leave the window open whenever a sharp east wind was blowing. In defiance of etiquette, if anything playful were said at

table, Lottie Stone was certain to laugh; and she would stand, dish in hand, to listen to a lively anecdote related by Isa to her brother, quite oblivious of the fact that the viands were growing cold. Gently and smilingly Isa corrected the mistakes of the inexperienced Lottie, and tried to soften down the displeasure of Mr. Gritton, who was far less disposed to show indulgence. Much might be excused, she would observe, in a girl so perfectly honest and truthful; the grain of the wood was so good, that it was worth taking the trouble to work it, and the polish would be added in time. Isa encouraged Lottie to open her heart to her without reserve; but for this kindly intercourse between mistress and maid, the life of the young girl would have had little of brightness, as Hannah, the only other servant, was both ill-tempered and deaf. "Miss Isa" was all in all to Lottie, looked up to, beloved and obeyed with affectionate devotion. Lottie's happiest time was the half-hour spent at night with her mistress; for while she brushed Isa's long silky tresses, the lady entered into conversation with her. When Miss Gritton first trusted her beautiful hair into Lottie's inexperienced hands, she had something to suffer as well as to teach; but pains and patience had their usual effect, and it was only when the little maid was speaking of something of special interest that she tried the philosophy of her kind young mistress.

"So you were at the lecture to-night, Lottie. I

hope that you were attentive to all that the clergyman said."

"I did try to be so, Miss Isa; there were things as I couldn't make out; but Mrs. Bolder and me, we was talking it over all the way home, and was looking for the Midianites in the heart."

"And did you find any?" asked Isa.

"Mrs. Bolder, she was a-saying that it's very hard to keep out distrust when things go so contrary in life. She has a deal of trouble, has Mrs. Bolder, now that her husband's laid up and crippled with rheumatics, and she's all the work of the shop upon her; it's a'most too much for her, she says. She can't help wondering why God should send such sickness and pain to her husband, who was al'ays a good, steady-going man, and a tea-totaller,"—Lottie uttered the word almost with reverence; "if he'd been given to drink it would have been different, you know."

The saddened tone of Lottie as she uttered the last sentence reminded Isa of what Mr. Eardley had told her of the early trials of this more than orphan girl. A brutal father, addicted to intemperance, had made the hovel in which Lottie had passed the first years of her life, a den of poverty and woe. Then this father, unworthy of the name, had absconded, deserting an unhappy wife and two children, the elder of whom, a boy, from physical infirmities and dulness of mind, was yet more helpless than the poor

little girl. Mr. Eardley had been for years the earthly protector of the family; he had procured employment for Deborah Stone, had had her children taught in his school, had, as we know, found a place for Lottie as soon as she was able to take one, and had often put such work in the way of her brother as the poor lad was not incapacitated from performing.

"And did you find the Midianite Distrust in your own soul also?" asked Isa.

The mournful tone of Lottie changed to a cheerful one as she made reply, "Oh! as mother says, who's to trust God if we don't, when He has helped us through such a many troubles, and given us such kind friends? Only—just—sometimes," she added more slowly, "when I thinks of poor father, then a feeling will come; but I s'pose it's wrong, God is so good!" and she sighed.

Isa perceived that the shadow of the poor girl's great trial lay on her young heart still.

"You can always pray for your father, Lottie."

"I do, Miss Isa, I do, morning and evening, and so does mother; and surely God will hear!" cried the girl, brightening up at the thought. "He knows where bees father, though we don't; and maybe He will bring him back to us at last."

There was something touching to Isa in the clinging affection of the young creature towards a parent whom she could not honour, and whom she had so little cause to love. "And did you find any Dis-

content lurking within?" inquired the lady, returning to the point of conversation from which she had diverged.

"Discontent!" repeated Lottie, opening her black eyes wide at the question; "oh, Miss Isa, how could I—with meat every day, and a whole sovereign every quarter? That would be ungrateful indeed! Ah! if you knew how we lived here at Wildwaste when I was little, in the cottage that's been pulled down—close by the 'Jolly Gardener' it was, where the school is a-standing now! We've been half the day—mother, brother, and I—without breaking a bit of bread; and we might have been the other half too," added Lottie naively, "had not Mrs. Holdich been so kind, and the tall gentleman from the Castle, bless him! he brought us nice things from his own table under his cloak."

"Do you speak of Mr. Madden?" asked Isa, with a little tremulousness in her tone.

"Yes; the best, the kindest gentleman as ever lived—barring Mr. Eardley," said Lottie warmly. "He was al'ays teaching the children good, and looking arter the poor."

"Lionel Madden," murmured Isa dreamily; it was the first time for years that that name had passed her lips.

"Oh, no, not he!" exclaimed Lottie, in a tone more emphatic than her hearer liked, for it conveyed more distinctly than words that Lionel was one of

the last persons likely to play the philanthropist in the manner described. "It was not he but his brother. Mr. Lionel! he never gave to nobody, nor did nothing for nobody as ever I heard of; only," added the girl, with a little laugh, "he switched my brother over the head with his riding-whip once, to make him stand out of his way."

Isa did not care to keep up the conversation; she took up an elegantly bound book which lay on her toilette table, to convey a hint of silence to her little maid-servant. The volume was a collection of sacred poetry, and the lady's eyes rested long and thoughtfully upon the well-known verse on which their gaze first fell as she opened the book. It appeared like a comment on what she had heard that evening on the subject of Disappointment.

"Good when He gives, supremely good,
Nor less when He denies;
E'en trials from His sovereign hand
Are *blessings in disguise.*"

So, whether she acknowledged the fact or not, had it been in God's dealings with Isa Gritton.

CHAPTER V.

THE DEATH-BED MESSAGE.

ISA awoke on the following morning with a feeling of oppression on her heart, a vague impression that something had been neglected which ought to have been done, and she connected that something with the lecture which she had heard on the preceding day. Several minutes passed, however, before she could trace back the links of thought to the actual cause of her uneasiness, as it lay out of the general course of reflection suggested by the subject of the lecture. Then Isa recalled the words which at the time that she heard them had painfully reminded her of a death-bed scene, perhaps the saddest recollection left on a mind which had had of late much experience of sorrow. "The Christian may be called to draw upon himself the anger of men by defending the truth, or upholding the cause of the oppressed."

"It is more than two years," reflected Isa, "since I received a sacred charge from the dying lips of my dear father; and that charge I have never obeyed. For more than two years may an orphan have been

suffering wrong on account of my brother, and during all this time I have let the sin rest on his soul. I first put off an explanation till I should meet him; then, when we met, I shrank from doing my duty. I quieted conscience with every kind of frivolous excuse; he was too delicate, too sensitive, too busy, it would be better to delay speaking till we should be alone together in some peaceful home. We have been alone together, we have passed hours, days, weeks in each other's society with nothing to hinder me from speaking, except my own cowardly dislike of saying what might probably offend. Surely cowardice like this is another Midianite in possession, and I shall never know real peace till I have wrestled it down. Whenever the remembrance of that charge comes over my mind, it is like a cloud darkening the sunshine, and throwing a chill around. God help me to fulfil at length a neglected duty! I will speak to Gaspar before this day has passed over."

To some strong natures there might have appeared little that was formidable in the task before her; but to Isa it was peculiarly painful. Brought up as an only daughter, tenderly nurtured from her cradle, she had hardly known what it was to have to encounter even a grave look, or a hasty word,—Isa had never learned to *endure hardness*. Fond of pleasing, both from natural kindliness of heart and love of approbation, Isa never willingly gave offence;

with her to inflict pain was to suffer it. Isa delighted in deeds of kindness and works of beneficence; to comfort the sorrowing, or rejoice with the happy was congenial to her womanly spirit; but to restrain, rebuke, oppose, the sterner duties which are sometimes assigned to the most gentle of the sex in the battle-field of life, cost Isa an effort which can only be appreciated by those of a disposition like her own.

Isa's heart throbbed uneasily with the feeling that the explanation so long dreaded, so long put off, was at hand, as she sat in the apartment which she called her boudoir, but which was always used as a breakfast-room. The bronze urn was hissing on the table, on which was spread a somewhat meagre repast. Awaiting her brother, who was late, Isa placed herself by the window, and gazed forth on the prospect before her. There was little to charm in that prospect, even on a bright spring day. A tract of common spread in front, dotted with golden patches of blossoming furze; but the picturesqueness of heath land was marred by the low-lying hamlet which was the foreground of the landscape. The cottages, or rather hovels of Wildwaste, wore an appearance of squalor and decay which was not softened by the charm which moss, and lichen, and clustering ivy can throw around even ruins. They appeared rather falling to pieces because originally ill-built than because they were ancient. The only tenement at

Wildwaste which looked in perfect repair and with some pretension to beauty, was the neat little schoolhouse, erected by a Madden, but not, as Isa had soon learned from Lottie, either by Lionel or by Cora. "How pleasant," mused Isa, as she watched the little clusters of cottage children entering the low-browed porch, "how pleasant to leave behind such a memorial of a passing visit to a place as that young Arthur has left!" and as she thought of her brother, with his ample means yet penurious disposition, she felt painfully how far better it is to possess the heart to give than the money.

The soap-manufactory, lying a little to the right of the prospect, a huge unsightly square-windowed pile of brick and mortar, was a yet more conspicuous object than the hamlet of Wildwaste. It stood not two hundred yards from Isa's home, so that when the wind blew from that quarter she dared not open the windows to let in the breezes, so polluted were they by smoke and evil scent. The only redeeming feature in the landscape seen from the lodge was the park which skirted the road beyond the common, the beautiful park above whose light leafy screen rose the gray turrets of Castle Lestrange. There, indeed, beauty and peace might dwell; thence no ruder sound would be heard than the cuckoo's note or the nightingale's song. Isa's eyes, overlooking nearer and less pleasing objects, constantly wandered to those verdant woods, those lofty picturesque towers.

Gasper entered the sitting-room with a complaint on his lips against "treacherous weather" on that clear April morn, for he was never weary of contrasting the climate of England with that of Jamaica, much to the disadvantage of the former, though the heat of the latter seemed to have dried up and withered his frame. He seated himself at the table, and began cutting the stale loaf (bread at the lodge was always stale), but interrupted himself with the observation "how one misses the papers of a morning! Isa, I wish you'd ask your uncle, the baronet, to send over the *Times* every day."

"I should hardly like to ask that favour," replied Isa, leaving the window, and joining her brother at the breakfast-table.

"And why not?" inquired Gaspar peevishly; "are you afraid of robbing the servant's hall?"

"No," said Isa, as she occupied herself with the tea-caddy; "but my uncle would naturally think that we might take in a paper for ourselves, instead of putting him to the inconvenience of sending a mile every morning."

"I'm not the idiot to throw away my money on what may be had for the asking; you have so much foolish pride," muttered Mr. Gritton. "I feel myself out of the world where I can't get a glimpse of the money-market or the shipping report."

That word "shipping," served as a cue to Isa. While sitting by the window she had been revolving

in her mind how she should introduce the subject of her father's dying message to Gaspar. Isa was convinced that her long silence had been sinful, and having "screwed up her courage to the sticking-point," was on the watch for an opportunity of saying what she had determined should be said. Too anxious to make some commencement to be able to do so without the appearance of effort, Isa abruptly remarked, in a tone that betrayed a little nervousness, "Is not your interest in the shipping chiefly on account of the *Orissa?*"

"The *Orissa?*" repeated Mr. Gritton in accents of surprise; "why, all the world knows that she foundered nigh four years ago, passengers saved, cargo lost, and the greater part uninsured."

"Had you anything to do with the vessel?" asked Isa, timidly feeling her way.

Gaspar looked a little embarrassed by the question. "Yes—no"—he replied, almost with a stammer. "I might have had a stake in that vessel—I thought of having—'twas lucky I had not; there had been such a run for certain goods in the West Indian market, that the cargo was expected to bring double its value. But—but you know nothing—and care nothing about matters of business," he added, stretching out his hand for the cup of tea which his sister had poured out. "Has the post brought any letters this morning?"

Isa did not suffer the current of conversation to

be thus abruptly turned. Merely shaking her head in reply to the question, she nerved herself to go one step further. "Who was the orphan whose property was in some way or other connected with the *Orissa?*"

"Orphan! what do you mean? Who on earth talked to you about an orphan?" Isa felt—for she dared not look up—that her brother's eyes were keenly scrutinising her face.

"Better have the whole truth out at once," thought poor Isa, who, in her nervousness, was emptying the milk-jug into the teapot. "The fact is, dear Gaspar," she said, speaking with rapidity and a sensation of breathlessness, "I have been anxious for a long time to talk to you about some words uttered by our beloved father a very very short time before we lost him. When he was almost too ill to speak, he said"—Isa pressed her forehead as if to collect her thoughts—"he said, 'Gaspar—you will be with him—the *Orissa*—not her money lost—tell him from me;' the dear lips had not power to finish the sentence."

"Did my father say anything more than these words?" asked Gaspar, who saw from the quivering of Isa's lashes and the trembling of her lip that she, at least, attached some importance to the fragmentary message.

Isa pressed her hands very tightly together; she could hardly articulate the broken sentences,—"He

said, '*something wrong*—he should deal fairly by that orphan'— I can remember no more."

Gaspar rose abruptly from his seat and walked to the window Isa felt the brief silence which followed almost unendurable, and yet was thankful that she had been enabled to speak out the whole truth at last. After a few seconds Gaspard returned to his seat, and with a rapid—Isa fancied a slightly tremulous utterance—thus addressed his sister:

"Isa, your ears deceived you—your memory is at fault—or—or there was a wandering of mind at the last. You shall know exactly how the case lies. A young lady, known to my father and myself, had some thousands of pounds which she wished to invest, four years ago, during my short visit to England. My father was consulted on the business. There was a sudden demand for a particular kind of goods in the West Indies; money invested in them might double itself if no time were lost; the girl was eager to increase her property—natural enough,—I was employed in making the arrangement—ship went down—goods uninsured—she had staked her property, and lost it. This was no fault of mine; you might blame the captain or the crew—or the winds and the waves; I was never blamed by Cora Madden herself."

"Cora Madden!" ejaculated Isa.

"You know the whole truth now," said Gaspar; "let us never come on the subject again."

Isa felt bewildered by the sudden disclosure of the name of the orphan in whom she had taken such painful interest; so much so, that she could hardly tell at that time whether the explanation of Gaspar were satisfactory or not to her mind. When the name of Cora was uttered, Isa's surprise had made her for a moment look full in the face of her brother, and that face—which had been almost ghastly—had become suffused with a colour which she had never before seen upon it, and the eyes of Gaspar had instantly sunk beneath the gaze of her own. Isa hardly noticed this in the excitement of the instant, but it afterwards often recurred to her mind, with an ever-strengthening persuasion that her brother had *not* told her all.

The subject of the death-bed message was dropped, but Isa felt during the remainder of that morning that her brother's nerves had been shaken, and that his spirits were utterly out of tune; and she could not but refer this to its natural cause—the conversation at breakfast. Nothing pleased Mr. Gritton; the tea was bitter, cold, undrinkable; the room full of draughts; Lottie a useless idiot, and Mr. Eardley little better for having ever recommended her. Isa came in for her full share of peevish reproach, almost more difficult to be borne than angry rebuke. It was a great relief to the young lady when her companion at length quitted her boudoir to go down to his accounts, though Isa well knew that these ac-

counts would afford a new cause of grievance, and that all her care to manage household affairs with strict economy would not prevent pettish remarks on the extravagance of the Saturday bills.

"I shall not be able to endure this kind of life long," murmured Isa to herself, as she returned from ordering dinner, having had to encounter the ill-temper of Hannah, who, while her master inveighed against reckless extravagance, complained on the other hand that there were "some ladies as think that their servants can live upon nothing." "I was never made to bear all this constant fret and worry," sighed the discouraged Isa; "this perpetual effort to please, without the possibility of succeeding in doing so." Isa was, like so many others, tempted to think that the post in which Providence had placed her was not the one that suited her; that she would *do* better—*be* better in another. Disappointment, discontent, distrust, had not been driven forth from her heart. Again Isa seated herself by the window which commanded a view of the towers of Lestrange, feeling disinclined to settle to any occupation, to take up her work, or to finish her book.

A visit from Edith made a delightful break on the dreary solitude of Isa.

"I have come with a message from Papa, dear Isa," cried the baronet's daughter, after an affectionate greeting had passed between the cousins; "he has charged me to carry you back captive with me to

the Castle, to remain there as long as we can make our prisoner happy. Oh! don't make resistance—lay down your arms and surrender at once!" The pleading eyes seconded well the playful petition of the lips.

A prisoner! nay, to Isa the invitation came like an offer of freedom to one in irksome bondage. Her countenance lighted up with pleasure. "I should gladly surrender to so generous a foe," she replied, "only—my brother—"

"He will let me carry you off—I'm sure that he will," cried Edith.

"I will go and ask him," said Isa, hastily rising and quitting the room.

Edith, left thus alone, looked around the boudoir of her cousin with mingled pity and surprise. "Poor Isa, is this her abode? so small, so wretchedly furnished, so dreary and bare. And what a view from the window!" added the heiress, as she sauntered up to the casement; "the very look of those tumble-down cottages would make one miserable; and as for that hideous manufactory, it would spoil the fairest landscape in the world. No wonder that Isa was not able to echo my words when I said, 'there is no place like home.'"

Isa soon returned with her brother's permission for her to accompany her cousin, a permission which he could hardly have withheld. Edith knew not how ungraciously it had been accorded, how bitterly

Gaspar had remarked, "I knew that you would never care to stay quietly here with an invalid brother."

"Had he been like a brother to me," was Isa's mental comment when she quitted the room, "no pleasure would have drawn me from his side." Nevertheless Mr. Gritton's observation gave pain to his sister, and so did the distressed look on the face of Lottie, when hastily summoned to help her young mistress in her preparations for quitting the Lodge.

"Oh, Miss Isa, I hope you'll not be long away; we'll be just lost without you;" and Isa saw that moisture rose in Lottie's black eyes.

Isa returned with Edith to the Castle, where she was graciously received by her stately uncle. Two beautiful rooms, exquisitely furnished, one opening into the other, had been assigned to her; none in the Castle commanded a more beautiful prospect. Swiftly the hours rolled by amidst varied occupations. Cheerful was the afternoon saunter in the park with Edith, and the little dinner-party in the evening, when Isa met with congenial society. Pleasant on the following morning was the drive to the distant church, and very refreshing to the spirit the sacred service, conducted with none of the lifeless formality which cast such a chill over Isa's devotion in the church which she had attended with Gaspar. Delightful was the evening converse with Edith; converse on high and holy themes. Then, on the

Monday morning, Isa much enjoyed visiting with her sweet young cousin some of the dwellings of Sir Digby's poorer tenants, bearing little delicacies to invalids from the baronet's luxurious table. All these employments were in themselves innocent and good, and to Isa would have afforded unmixed gratification, but for a feeling which would intrude itself on her mind, that she was where she liked to be rather than where she ought to be—that even her holiest pleasures were rather of her own taking than of God's bestowing. Whenever Gaspar or Wildwaste were mentioned, a slightly uncomfortable sensation was experienced by Isa. Well she knew that her presence was more needed in the dreary Lodge than in the stately Castle; more by the peevish invalid than by the happy young girl; a brother, an only brother, had a stronger claim on her care than a cousin. Isa suspected, though she cared not to search for confirmation of the suspicion, that Self-indulgence was another Midianite in possession of her soul.

So passed the time till Tuesday brought the little meeting in the cottage of Holdich, which the cousins attended. The first face which Isa caught sight of on entering the crowded room was that of her maid, Lottie Stone, beaming with an expression of honest pleasure at seeing her mistress again. Isa and Edith were a little late in joining the meeting, the former had therefore no opportunity of speaking to Lottie till the lecture and prayers were over.

CHAPTER VI.

LECTURE II.

FAITH IN THE PROMISE.

WE left Gideon at his lowly task, threshing corn by the wine-press to hide it from the Midianites. The Israelite lifted up his eyes, and, behold, One stood before him, clothed in human form, and yet nor man nor angel; for from the words which He afterwards uttered, such as no created being dare have breathed, we recognise in Him the eternal Son of God. As the Lord appeared to Abraham in the plains of Mamre, to Jacob by the ford of Jabbok, to Moses on the height of Sinai, so appeared He now to Gideon beneath the oak-tree of Ophrah. Unconscious of the divinity of his Guest, Gideon still appears to have received with reverence the greeting of the mysterious stranger, as though aware that He came as a messenger from the Most High.

"The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour!" was the salutation of the Holy One to the son of a despised and persecuted race.

"Oh, my Lord," exclaimed Gideon, "if the Lord

be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all the miracles which our fathers told of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? But now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hand of the Midianites."

How often must such thoughts have passed through the mind of Gideon before they thus found vent in words. Faith, sorely tried by present trouble, was trying to draw from memories of the past hope for the future. God, who had crushed the pride of Pharaoh, and led His people forth from Egyptian bondage, would He not now save and avenge? There had been miracles of old; such mercies as had been experienced by the fathers, might they not also be reserved for the children? Was the Lord's arm shortened that it could not save; was He unmindful of the groans of His people? Oh, why had He forsaken Israel, and given His heritage unto reproach?

"And the Lord looked upon Gideon, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites; have I not sent thee?"

Let us dwell for a few moments on the words, *the Lord looked upon Gideon.* Thrice in the Scriptures do we read of a look from Him who beholdeth all things in heaven and earth. In one sense the omniscient God is for ever gazing down upon His creation; from Him ocean depths are no hiding-place, and midnight darkness no screen. The eyes

of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good. But on some special occasions God's glance has in a peculiar way been directed upon man, as the sunbeams that shine on all may be concentrated in the focus of a burning-glass to kindle or to destroy. The Lord *looked* from the pillar of cloud upon the Egyptians, and they were troubled —they felt God's wrath in that gaze; the Lord *looked* upon Gideon, and in that glance was new courage and strength; the Lord *looked* upon Peter, and beneath that gaze of divine compassion and love his heart was broken and melted, and fast flowed his penitential tears. Have we ever known the power of that look in our hearts, to crush our sins, to encourage our faith, to bring us in deep contrition to the feet of our merciful Lord?

Gideon, like Moses before him, seems to have shrunk from the post of high honour to which he was called by God; like Moses, he thought of his own unfitness instead of the almighty power of Him who can employ—and often does employ—feeble instruments to accomplish the most noble and difficult works. "Oh, my Lord," he cried, "wherewith shall I save Israel? Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." Before honour is humility; had Gideon been great or wise in his own eyes, we may well believe that God would have passed him by, to choose one of a lowlier spirit to be the leader of Israel's hosts.

"Surely I will be with thee," said the Lord. "and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man."

Still Gideon appears to have hesitated; perhaps a doubt lingered on his mind as to the nature of Him who spake as having authority, but who as yet had wrought no miracle to prove His divine commission. "If now I have found grace in Thy sight," said Gideon, "then show me a sign that Thou talkest with me. Depart not hence, I pray Thee, until I come unto Thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before Thee." And the Holy One said, "I will tarry till thou come again."

Then—like his father Abraham, glad to entertain the heavenly Guest—Gideon made ready a feast. He prepared a kid, and unleavened cakes, and brought them forth to the Lord, who had graciously awaited his return under the oak of Ophrah—a spot which became as a temple consecrated by His divine presence.

The Holy One bade Gideon lay the food on the rock, and pour out the broth. What man designed for a feast, God would receive as a sacrifice. With the end of the staff which was in His hand the sacred Guest touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and the stone on which they lay became as an altar. Fire arose from the rock and consumed the offering of Gideon, and the divine Being—who had thus accepted as God what was presented to Him as man—vanished out of the sight of His servant.

The first emotion of the astonished Gideon seems to have been that of terror. "Alas! O Lord God," he exclaimed, "because I have seen an angel of the Lord face to face."

A gracious promise of love came in answer to that cry of fear; we know not whether the divine voice sounded in the mortal's ear, or but spoke with mysterious power in his soul. The Lord said unto Gideon, "Peace be unto thee, fear not; thou shalt not die."

Then, in that holy spot where the Lord had deigned to appear in human guise, Gideon built an altar, and called it *Jehovah shallum*, which is, *the Lord send peace.*

And now, beloved friends, let us apply to our hearts the lessons contained in this portion of the history of Gideon. Hath not the Lord appeared unto us with a promise of help and deliverance, if we in His might will struggle against the enemies within? He comes to us not only in the house of prayer, not only in seasons of holy communion, but when we, like Gideon, are following the common occupations of life. His eye is fixed upon us in tender compassion, and His message to the lowly Christian entering on the battle-field of life is this: *Go in this thy might, have I not sent thee? I will be with thee.*

Let us glean from the Scriptures some promises of this blessing of the Lord's peculiar presence with His people. To those obeying His command to

preach the gospel amongst all nations, how precious through centuries of toil and peril has been the gracious assurance: *Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.* To those almost sinking under the heavy trials of life, how full of comfort is the promise: *Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness.* Through life, even unto the grave, the power of that promise extends, so that the Christian can add in lowly trust: *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me.*

But who are they who can thus take to themselves the precious promises of Christ? They who have come to Him in lowly faith; or rather, they to whom the Lord hath come in the power of redeeming love. In the history of Gideon we see a type of the Lord's dealings with His people. He is found of them that sought Him not; He comes to the sorrowful, the oppressed, the tempted, and offers to them the free deliverance which His mercy alone can bestow. We have nothing to give the sacred Guest but the offering of a sin-stained heart, a heart wholly unworthy of his acceptance, *till He touch it,* as He touched the offering of Gideon, and the flame of divine love is kindled, and the sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart becomes acceptable unto

the Lord. Then, like Gideon, may we raise our altar with grateful thanksgiving; and, while preparing for the struggle with indwelling sin, feel assured that the Lord will "send peace."

We are also reminded, by this transient visit of the Son of God to the world, of His longer sojourn with the children of Israel, when for more than thirty-three years the Redeemer waited on earth till the bitter cup should be filled to the brim—till the great Sacrifice should be offered—and then ascended to His Father in heaven, thereby granting additional proof of His divinity to His adoring people. "The Lord send peace," was the name given by Gideon to his altar, and our Lord's words on the night before His crucifixion sound like a response to that name: *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*

But what is the promised peace? To Gideon his heavenly Visitor had spoken of conflict: "Go in this thy might, thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man." In this command to Gideon, my brethren, we hear our Master's charge to ourselves, and learn what it is that can give us strength to obey that charge. The Christian is promised peace, but it is such as may be realised to some degree even in the midst of conflict; and it is that peace which, after conflict, in its perfection crowneth victory.

The Midianites within must be conquered, and

the might which conquers is from God. If disappointment blight our hopes, discontent fret our spirits, dissension mar our peace, distrust shrink from expected trials, we must yet lift up our eyes unto the hills from whence cometh our help—we must yet ask, and we shall receive, the grace which can supply all our need, and enable us to rise above the infirmities of the flesh, the weakness of our fallen nature. Let us trust fearlessly, let us trust alone in the might of our Lord. As long as we remain in presumptuous self-confidence, the Midianites rest in possession; when we cast ourselves in earnest prayer at the feet of the Saviour, He maketh us *more than conquerors.*

We contemplated Faith, when last we met here, as the tree which in winter stands bare of foliage, black and leafless, yet with life within it. With Gideon now that tree had felt the warm breath of spring—the Lord had looked upon it, and the living sap had risen under the beams of the Sun of Righteousness; the green leaves of hope were budding on the boughs. Gideon had not as yet conquered his foes, but the Lord had promised that he should do so, and the expectation of triumph was before him.

Christian brethren, let us also rejoice in help, and so gird ourselves up for the struggle before us, taking as the motto on our banner, *Go in this thy might,* and as the cordial to our weak fainting hearts the promise, *I will be with thee.*

CHAPTER VII.

A SERMON BY THE FIRESIDE.

ISA stopped to speak a few words to Lottie after the short service was ended.

"Oh, Miss Isa, I do hope you won't be away long," cried the young girl, looking up into the face of her mistress with a pleading expression; "we do miss you so sadly!"

"Is my brother better?" asked Isa.

"Master shuts himself up a deal in his room, and don't care to be disturbed, and seems worried like—he do," replied Lottie with rustic simplicity, and in a tone from which Isa too readily gathered that neither Gaspar's spirits nor his temper had improved since her departure. "Oh, Miss Isa, I wish you'd come back!"

"Tell my brother that, without fail, I'll come and see him to-morrow."

"And stay with him?" asked Lottie, anxiously.

Isa hesitated for a moment, but she could not bring herself to say "Yes." There was to be on the following evening another of those delightful little parties at the Castle, at which Isa anticipated that she would enjoy one of the sweetest and purest

of pleasures, that of converse with the intellectual, the refined, and the good—converse that gratifies at once the mind and the heart. Isa was little disposed to exchange such pleasure for a dull, cheerless evening at the Lodge, spent beside a peevish valetudinarian, who would neither appreciate nor thank her for the sacrifice. No; she would make a compromise with conscience; she would give the morning to her brother, and doubly enjoy the evening from the consciousness of having performed an irksome duty. Isa sent by Lottie a message to her brother, and then, only half satisfied with herself, returned with Edith to the Castle.

Lottie walked silently for a little time beside Mrs. Bolder, the grocer's wife, who was always the young girl's companion to and from the evening meeting. Lottie broke the silence by a sigh.

"Oh, but the house has grown dull and lonesome!" she murmured. "Half of the pleasure of going to the lecture was to talk it over after, and have the hard things explained."

"You don't find old Hannah much of a companion, I suppose."

"Hannah," repeated Lottie dolefully; "she never speaks to me but to chide; nor does master, for the matter of that. Oh, how I does miss dear mother and brother! there's no one near me as cares for me, now that Miss Isa's away. I'm afeard that the Midianite Discontent is creeping in after all." Poor

Lottie, with her warm, impulsive, affectionate nature, found even the "meat every day, and a sovereign a quarter," insufficient to brighten her solitary lot.

"We ought to have learned this evening how to get rid of the Midianite," observed quiet Mrs. Bolder, but in a melancholy tone, for she herself was oppressed with cares, and had by nature little spirit to struggle against them.

"Yes," said Lottie more cheerfully; "*I will be with thee*, that is a wonderful word! I will repeat it over and over to myself, when I lie down, and when I get up, and when I'm about my work. We should never feel lonesome or sad when the dear Lord says, *I will be with thee;* with us all through our lives, and then when the time comes for us to die, we know that we shall be *with Him.*"

The same promise which strengthened a warrior of old for heroic deeds, cheered and encouraged a little servant maid in her path of humble toil. Lottie trod more lightly on her way when she thought of Gideon and his heavenly Guest.

Mrs. Bolder, after she had parted from Lottie, turned towards the single shop in the hamlet of Wildwaste, which was kept by herself and her husband. The shutters were up, so she saw no light, but the door was upon the latch, and she entered through the shop into the little back parlour where Tychicus Bolder, seated by the fire, was awaiting his wife's return from the meeting.

Sadly poor Miriam looked on what she called "the wreck of such a fine man!" Over the hard-featured, smoke-dried looking face of Bolder, wrinkled with many a line traced by care and pain, hung the white hair, streaked here and there with iron gray. His beard had grown long, and lay on his sunken chest; his back was bowed, his knees drawn up, as he sat with his feet on the fender, with a black shawl of his wife's wrapped round his rheumatic frame. Bolder could not turn his head without pain; but he bade his wife shut the door, come and sit beside him, and tell him all about the parson's lecture.

"Oh, how different it was in the days when it was you that went, and you that had the telling—you who can talk like a parson yourself!" sighed Mrs. Bolder, as she stirred the fire, which was getting low, as Bolder had no power to stir it himself.

"Wife," said Bolder solemnly, "you've been to a lecture, and I daresay a good one, for I think more of Mr. Eardley now than I did in old times; but I've had my sermon too, as I sat here by the fire, and my preacher was one as spoke with more power than Mr. Eardley, or any other parson under the sun!"

"Why, who can have been here?" exclaimed Mrs. Bolder, glancing towards the door.

"Sit down, wife, and I'll tell you all," said

Tychicus Bolder. "When you had gone out, and I was left alone with my pain—"

"I'm sure I'd gladly have stayed with you," interrupted Miriam; "I went because you told me to go."

"I know it—I know it—I sent you. Well, as I sat here alone with my pain, I began turning over in my mind what you'd told me of the last lecture, of the Midianites in possession. Ay, thinks I, I have them all here, every one of the four. There's Disappointment; for wasn't I a thriving man, and looking to get up higher and higher in the world—leave this place and take a larger business in Axe—till this sickness came, and pulled me back, and made it hard enough to struggle on here."

Mrs. Bolder mournfully shook her head.

"And isn't there Discontent; for it has often seemed as if the pain, and the weakness, and the helplessness were a'most more than man could bear!"

"I'm sure that no one could bear them more—" Miriam stopped in the midst of her sentence, less from a doubt as to its perfect truth than because she saw that her husband did not wish to be interrupted; so she relapsed into her usual position—that of a listener.

"There's Dissension, for I feel ready to quarrel with all the world; and Distrust, for I can't bring myself to think that I've not been hardly dealt

with. Now if, as the parson said, all these enemies are most like to come, like the Midianites, to a soul where there's been an idol set up, where was the idol in mine? You see, wife, pain and loneliness set an old man thinking."

"You never had an idol," said the wife; "in the midst of such a drunken, disorderly, quarrelsome set as we have here in Wildwaste, you took the pledge, and kept it too—never a drop of the poison wetted your lips; there's not many a man would have kept steady, standing all alone as you did. And then you didn't worship Mammon; no man can say of you that your money was not honestly earned —every penny that you took in."

"Bating a few overcharges," muttered Bolder; "on the whole, I did keep my hands pretty clean."

"And you was so religious, too; knew your Bible so well, could have done for a preacher yourself. If a parson made a mistake, or wasn't quite sound in the doctrine, you was the man who could set him right; you was such a judge of a sermon!"

"I thought myself so," said Bolder.

"I can't make out the reason why God sends you all these troubles," pursued the admiring wife, "unless it be as He let them come to Job, 'cause he was better than any one else, and God wanted to try his patience."

"Now, wife, it's all very well that you should think this," said Bolder, in his peculiar tone of de-

cision, "I was ready enough to think it myself; but when I came this evening to turn the matter over as I sat here alone, I could not look at things just in the same light as before. I found this soul of mine all full of what the parson calls Midianites; I had not noticed one of 'em when I was in health and prosperity, but when troubles came, then came they, like the birds of prey round a sick sheep as it lies in the field. Then I set to thinking what idol I could have set up when all things seemed going well with me;—no, don't interrupt me, Miriam—I was certain there had been something wrong. And then an old anecdote came into my mind, which I'd heard many years back, but which I'd never really understood—I mean with my heart, not my head. It was about a young parson who was talking on religion to an old pious ploughman as they walked together in a field. Says the parson, 'The hardest thing is to deny sinful self.' 'Nay, sir,' said the ploughman, 'the hardest thing, I take it, is to deny *righteous* self.' Why, here, thinks I, is the key to the whole matter. Here have I been living in Wildwaste, counting myself an example to all the people around, thanking God, like the Pharisee, that I was a deal better than other men, sitting in judgment even at church, setting up a great idol of self. And so God has let the enemies come in, just to show me that I am not the saint that I took myself for, just to set me crying to Him for help, to bring me to say, what

else I had never said, *I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.*"

Mrs. Bolder, who had been accustomed to look up to her husband as a kind of infallible pope in his home, one whose wisdom should never be doubted, whose opinions should never be disputed, could not at once alter her long-cherished ideas, but only ventured to express dissent by a little mournful shake of the head.

"I was always ready enough to judge others," continued Bolder, "but it was a new thing for me to judge myself. I was quick enough to see God's justice in punishing other men, but when the rod came upon myself, then His dealings seemed hard. I could almost exult when the publican's house was burnt and he ruined, or when the poor guilty wretch was smothered in the bog — that was righteous vengeance, said I. But when my own comfort was touched, when trouble came to my home, I could neither see mercy nor justice, and fierce, rebellious, unbelieving thoughts swept, like the Midianites, right over my soul."

"Mr. Bolder," said the anxious wife (she never ventured to address him by his Christian name), "I shall never like to leave you so long again, for I'm sure and certain that being alone is bad for your spirits."

"Wife, I was no more alone than Gideon was when the angel came to him under the oak. I told

you that a powerful preacher had been here, and I told you nought but the truth. The Lord has been preaching to this proud heart; and if you wish to know the text, it was this, *Unless ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter the kingdom of Heaven.* There be many mansions there, but not one for the self-righteous Pharisee. I had thought myself a long way on the road to heaven, and I found I'd to go back every step of the way, and begin at the beginning. If it had not been for what God has shown me, through sickness and trouble, of the evil lurking in my heart, I might have gone on blind and self-confident to the last, and never have had my eyes opened at all—till the terrible Day of Judgment."

It is doubtful whether Tychicus Bolder's words convinced his wife, but at least they silenced her, and she could feel that the change which had passed over the proud, opinionative man was a change for the better; he was more patient and resigned under suffering, and far less disposed to pass a sweeping sentence of condemnation on all his neighbours in Wildwaste. When Bolder began to judge himself, he became less ready to judge others; humility and charity are twin-sisters, and constantly walk hand-in-hand. Tychicus himself regarded that evening of quiet heart-searching as a crisis in his life; the Lord had visited his soul, and had left a blessing and a promise behind.

And is not this the history of many a human heart? The great enemy, ever on the watch to destroy, forms temptations of the very virtues of men, leading them, as it were, to make a raft of their own honesty, temperance, respectability, almsgiving, so that, trusting on that to stem the flood, they may not seek refuge in the only Ark that can bear them to a heavenly shore. The Almighty, on the other hand, making *all* things to work together for the good of His people, even their very failures and imperfections, shows them the hollowness and rottenness of all on which they rested, that they may not trust their soul's safety to anything but the merits and mercies of Christ. Praise, even from the lips of his heavenly Master, seems to have led St. Peter into presumption, so that the *Blessed art thou* had soon to be followed by the *Get thee behind me, Satan;* while through the guilt of a three-fold denial the apostle was led, by God's grace, to earnest repentance, distrust of himself, and more fervent love to his pardoning Lord. Thus God still enables a David to slay Goliath with his own sword. But for the visitation of the Midianites, grievous and evil as it was in itself, Gideon would perhaps never have been blessed with the visit of the angel of the Lord.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SISTER'S VISIT.

ISA did not fail to keep her promise. Finding that Mrs. Holdich was about to visit Wildwaste on the following morning, Isa availed herself of her escort; for the people of the hamlet were so rough, that the young lady disliked crossing the common alone. Rebekah Holdich carried with her a remedy for rheumatism, which she hoped might relieve the sufferings of Bolder. The steward's wife was the general doctress of the neighbourhood; to her, as to their natural friend, came all who had sorrow or sickness in their homes, just as any labourer in difficulty or distress was sure to seek the advice and help of her husband.

Isa Gritton entered into conversation with Rebekah, who was a woman of education and refinement beyond what might be expected from one in her station of life.

"I find," observed Isa, "that you were the first friend of my little maid Lottie, that it was you who taught her to read, and first led her to think of her soul, or rather to know that she had such a thing as a soul."

"I was very sorry for the poor little child; she had a most wretched home," replied Mrs. Holdich.

"Is it true that her father was of such a very violent temper?"

"So violent when he had been drinking," said Rebekah, "that I have seen the poor child disfigured for weeks from blows received from her father; and as for her unhappy mother, there is not a doubt that she would have been actually killed by Abner Stone in one of his drunken fits, had not Mr. Madden nobly saved her life at the peril of his own. The ruffian was going to dash out her brains with a poker."

"And Mr. Lionel came forward—"

"Oh, not Mr. Lionel," said Mrs. Holdich with a smile; "I am not aware that he ever entered a cottage; it was his younger brother, who is now labouring for God in the Holy Land, he who built the pretty school-house at Wildwaste, who saved poor Deborah's life. The beautiful carvings from Bethlehem which you saw in our cottage were sent to me by him."

"What has become of Lottie's father?" asked Isa, after having walked on for some minutes in silence.

"No one knows," replied Rebekah. "Abner Stone suddenly disappeared from this part of the country, after a gentleman had been found lying on the road, having been knocked off his horse by a

highwayman. It is more than suspected that Stone did the deed, but fled on hearing some one come up to the spot."

"It is strange," observed Isa, "that Lottie could speak with tenderness of such a parent; her eyes filled with tears when sne expressed her hopes that God would one day bring him back."

"Her mother will never hear a word spoken against him," said Rebekah. "Poor Deborah Stone is a true, faithful wife, and I believe prays night and day for the return of a husband whom she has loved through such trials as few but herself could have borne. I cannot help thinking," pursued the steward's gentle wife, "that there must have been some good even in Abner when he was sober; it is the fatal habit of drinking which makes a savage even of a kindhearted man."

"Lottie was looking sad yesterday evening at the lecture," observed Isa.

"Maybe the poor child frets after her mother and brother, they were never separated before; they have clung together through sorrow and hardship, and Lottie may feel lonely at first away from her home, though it is but a poor one."

"It is not easy to arrange for the family to meet," said Isa. "Mrs. Stone has to earn her own living, and Axe is at least six miles from Wildwaste."

"I hope that you will not mind my mentioning it, Miss Gritton," said Rebekah, in a deferential tone,

"but our little open cart is going on Saturday to Axe to bring our Ned to pass the Sunday with us," —Mrs. Holdich's eye brightened as she spoke of the expected visit from her son—"and if Lottie could be spared, I am sure that she would be most welcome to a place in it, to go and see her poor mother."

"A good and kind thought," replied Isa. "She might stay over Sunday at Axe, and return in the baker's cart on the following morning."

"If you could kindly spare her," repeated Mrs. Holdich, almost as much pleased at the prospect of the lonely Deborah having the comfort of a visit from her child, as in the expectation of welcoming her own.

"Leave of absence will be easily given," observed Isa, "especially as I am not living at Wildwaste at present; so the services of our little maid are less required, as she was engaged upon my account."

Mrs. Holdich turned towards the shop of Bolder, after accompanying Miss Gritton to the door of the new brick tenement which appeared to Isa yet more bare and destitute either of beauty or comfort every time that she returned from the wood-girdled Castle of Lestrange.

Lottie was waiting at the open door to receive her mistress, having been eagerly on the watch for her return.

"Would you like to go home to your mother, Lottie?" said Isa.

Instead of the sparkle of delight which Isa expected to call up in the black eyes of her little maid, an anxious look of inquiry filled them.

"Oh, Miss Isa! I know I bees awkward, I did break another saucer last night—but—but won't you give me a little longer trial?"

Isa was amused at the confession, made with evident effort, for the blood rushed to the face of the simple girl as she spoke. "I had no thought of sending you away, Lottie," said the young mistress, kindly; "but if you would like to pass a couple of days with your mother, Mrs. Holdich will give you a seat in her cart which is going on Saturday to Axe."

It was pleasant to Isa to see the sudden transition to joy on the countenance of her little servant; Lottie clapped her hands like a child to whom a holiday is promised. With a heart warmed by the sight of the innocent happiness which she had given, Isa Gritton opened the door of her brother's study, and entered the dull apartment with a light step and radiant smile, like one whose presence could make "sunshine in a shady place." Gaspar was seated by a fireless grate though shivering with chilliness, he would not indulge in a fire in April. He certainly looked even more sickly than usual, and Isa felt her cheerfulness damped at once as, without rising, her brother held out two cold fingers to her, with the dry observation, "So you can actually

leave the delights of the Castle for an hour, to see if your brother be dead or alive."

"Nay, dear Gaspar," said Isa, expostulatingly, as she seated herself by his side, "if I thought that you needed my society—that I could be a real comfort to you—" she stopped short, being too candid to make empty professions, and not having made up her mind how far she could truthfully go.

"I don't care for words, I like deeds," observed Gaspar, coldly; "women always can talk."

The fresh, bright colour which Isa had brought in from her walk over the common, deepened a little on her cheek, but she had resolved to be patient and cheerful, and let her visit give nothing but pleasure. Though it might be scarcely necessary to tell Gaspar that she had given a holiday to her young maid, it occurred to Isa that it might be well to show him the deference of asking his consent.

"Lottie would be very glad to see her mother," observed Isa after a short silence; "she is a poor, shy little bird that has never before left the nest; Mrs. Holdich has arranged to make all easy for her going on Saturday to Axe, if you'll kindly give her leave for two days."

"I shall do no such thing," replied Gaspar, peevishly; "I don't give a girl wages for going to see her mother."

Isa was a little annoyed, but without betraying that she felt so, observed, "I am sure that Hannah

would manage nicely without her for so short a time. You know, Gaspar, that you yourself thought a second servant unnecessary here."

"I do so still," said Mr. Gritton, taking a pinch of snuff, "but as long as I keep two, I'll have the services for which I pay."

"But Gaspar, I hope that this time—as a personal favour to myself—you will graciously grant leave of absence. I have given Lottie hopes, or rather permission to go to her mother, it would vex me were she to be disappointed."

Lottie herself had just opened the door, having come to ask Miss Isa if she would not take some refreshment after her walk. She caught Isa's last sentence, and stood with her hand on the door-handle, quite innocent of any intention of eavesdropping, but too anxious to hear her master's answer to think of anything else.

"Oh, you've given permission, have you! then I don't see why you should take the trouble of asking mine," said Gaspar, ungraciously. "Let her go, it is nothing to me; I don't care if she stay away altogether, an awkward, clumsy gipsy-girl, not worth the salt that she eats."

Lottie retreated, closing the door behind her, and ran hastily upstairs to indulge in a good hearty cry Isa saw the poor girl retiring, and was annoyed at the mortification so needlessly inflicted on a warm young heart.

Gaspar having, though so uncourteously, yielded the point in question, his sister changed the subject of conversation. She drew from her bag a copy of the "Times."

"I did not forget your wishes, Gaspar; but my uncle would be glad to have the paper back, as he has the 'Times' bound at the end of the year."

Gaspar took the periodical without thanks, and prepared himself for the enjoyment of its perusal by a copious pinch of snuff, scattering the brown powder as he did so over the printed sheet. Isa knew that the baronet was very particular about his papers, and mentally resolved never again to ask for a loan of the "Times."

Gaspar pushed his chair round towards the light, and settled himself to read, taking no further notice of Isa, who sat undecided whether to remain or to leave him to the occupation which he evidently found more interesting than her society. Isa had stored her memory with little anecdotes and small scraps of news which she thought might amuse the recluse, but Gaspar showed no wish to enter into conversation. His sister thought with regret of the time when they used to meet in London under the roof of a friend, when her brother had appeared to her to be all courtesy and kindness.

"Does he love me less because he knows me better?" was the disheartening thought which crossed her mind.

Mr. Gritton read for some minutes in silence, and Isa was thinking of rising to depart, when, looking over his newspaper, her brother suddenly addressed her.

"Isa, have you ever met that woman?"

"I do not know of whom you are speaking," answered Isa.

"Cora Madden, of course," said Gaspar. "I repeat—have you ever met her?"

"Yes; several times, years ago," replied his sister.

"And did you ever speak to her, did you come upon the subject of—of—what we were speaking about the other morning?"

"Certainly not," answered Isa; "I have never seen her since my loss; of our dear father's last words I have spoken to no one but yourself, I was not even aware of the name of the orphan to whom he referred."

Gaspar fixed on his sister a gaze so keen and suspicious that it aroused in her bosom an emotion of indignation. "Were you intimate with her, or with any of the Maddens?" he inquired, in the tone of a lawyer cross-questioning a witness. Isa shrank as if his rough hand had touched a scarcely healed wound.

"I was never intimate with Cora," she replied; "it seemed to me that she disliked me, but I never knew till now that she had any cause to do so."

"She had no cause—none—none," said Gaspar, almost stuttering in the eagerness of his denial. "I told you, and I tell you again, that you utterly mistook the meaning of that message from my father. I could not help the ship going down, I had always dealt fairly by Miss Madden."

There are occasions when something in the manner of a speaker serves not only to neutralize the force of his words, but actually to impress on the hearer a strong contradiction of the meaning intended. Such was the case with Gaspar's. Isa had had a suspicion that her brother had wronged Cora in some pecuniary matter, but his manner of denying it changed suspicion into conviction, and it kindled her indignation to believe that he was now adding falsehood to fraud. The very air of the room grew oppressive to Isa, the presence of Gaspar was painful, and when Mr. Gritton, after his stammered-forth declaration, became again absorbed in the "Times," making the rustling paper a screen between himself and his sister, Isa rose, unwilling to prolong so unpleasant a visit. The parting between brother and sister was cold and constrained; Gasper saw that he had not satisfied Isa, and mingled resentment, fear, and shame, struggled together in his breast. Isa gave a long-drawn sigh of relief when she found herself again in the open air, and could turn her back upon Wildwaste Lodge.

"I am certain that wrong has been done,"

thought Isa, as she slowly bent her steps towards Bolder's dwelling, "but it is not for me to repair it. Cora has been sent poverty, doubtless, as a well-merited chastisement, let me banish the subject from my mind. But why is it that my interest in the orphan's cause has so much cooled since I have learned that orphan's name? Why is it that even with my distress and shame on account of my unhappy brother there is mingled—dare I own it—something that resembles a feeling of gratified revenge! Here, indeed, is a Midianite in the soul! Cora is the only being upon earth whom I regard with actual aversion, but I knew not till now how such aversion could warp my sense of justice—of right! Oh! what revelations God makes to us of the evil lurking within our own hearts, which the world had not suspected, which we had never suspected ourselves!"

To Isa's self-reproach was added another emotion as painful, the fear that duty might call for some effort on her part to set right what was wrong, to work on the conscience of her brother, to try to induce him to retrace his steps if he had wandered from the path of rectitude. Isa trembled at the very thought of what might lie before her; never previously had duty worn to her an aspect so repulsive. Isa knew that she ought to endeavour, by self-denying kindness, to strengthen her influence over Gaspar; that it should be one of the chief objects of her life

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to win his confidence and his love; instead of doing this, she could not help perceiving with mortification that, since coming to Wildwaste, she had been steadily losing ground in the affections of her brother. He thought her selfish, worldly, indifferent to his comfort. Could it be that she was indeed so? Were her most pure and innocent earthly enjoyments becoming a snare to her soul?

Such distressing reflections kept Isa very silent as she retraced her steps towards Castle Lestrange by the side of Rebekah Holdich. The steward's wife had too much delicacy to intrude conversation where she saw that it would not be welcome; she perceived that the short visit to the Lodge had had the effect of damping the spirits of Miss Gritton. Rebekah's own heart, on the contrary, was filled with gladness, on account of the change which she had found in one who had once appeared to her hard and unimpressionable as granite. Tychicus had ever seemed to Rebekah an opinionative self-righteous man, and though she had pitied his sufferings, and had done what she could to relieve them, her compassion for the invalid had not been strengthened by personal regard. But on this day Rebekah had found Tychicus softened, humbled, subdued. She had heard him for the first time own that it had been good for him to be afflicted, for he had learned more of himself and of his Saviour in trouble than he had ever known in prosperous days. The furnace was doing its work, and while

Mrs. Bolder plaintively lamented that her husband must be "down in heart, to do himself such injustice," her friend was secretly rejoicing that the Pharisee as well as the publican may be led to cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

"I remember," thought Rebekah, "what Mr. Eardley once said to my boy when he stood watching a caterpillar spinning a very beautiful cocoon. 'God sets that little creature a task to do, and diligently and skilfully he does it; and so God gives us good works to perform in His name and for His sake. But were the insect to remain satisfied for ever in the silken ball which he is weaving, it would become not his home but his tomb. No; forcing a way through it, and not resting in it, will the winged creature reach sunshine and air. He must leave his own works behind if he would shine in freedom and joy. And so it is with the Christian. If he *rest in his own works*, whatever they may be, he is dead to God and lost to glory; he is making of what he may deem *virtues* a barrier between himself and his Saviour.' Yes," mused Rebekah; "God be praised that poor Bolder is making his way through the silken web; he is feeling the need of other righteousness than his own."

As soon as Isa arrived at the Castle, she tried to put away all remembrance of her painful visit to Wildwaste, but it haunted her during the greater part of the day. In the evening, however, when a

circle of friends gathered around Sir Digby's hospitable board, her efforts were more successful. Isa was naturally formed both to attract in society and to enjoy it; she delighted in "the feast of reason and the flow of soul;" her spirits had the elasticity of youth, and as she sat at the head of her uncle's table, with everything that could please and gratify around her, Isa felt that life might still become to her a bright and joyous thing. Her soul was as a well-tuned harp, giving out cheerful and harmonious music, till a few sentences overheard of the conversation between two of the guests, jarred on her as if a discordant string had been suddenly touched, and brought the shadow of past trial over the brightness of present enjoyment.

"You know Lionel Madden, then?"

"A little; his wife I have known for the last thirty years. I hear that their union is by no means a happy one, but what else could be expected when she married only for the sake of a handsome face, and he for that of a handsome fortune?"

"They say that Miss Madden made the match?"

"She certainly did," was the reply. "Cora had lost almost all her own money in some unlucky investment, so was resolved that her brother, at least, should keep a carriage. But in the case of the Maddens the driving fell to the share of the ladies, and the bride found that, as two suns cannot shine in one orbit, so two sisters-in-law cannot wield one

whip, and poor Cora was—metaphorically speaking —very speedily left on the road."

Isa felt her cheeks glow at this incidental mention of those whose fates had been so closely linked with her own, and, perhaps to cover her emotion, said in a very low voice to Mr. Eardley, who was seated beside her, "Do you not count the light gossip which sports with the characters and concerns of the absent, amongst 'the Midianites in the soul?'"

"I should count as such everything that mars the charity or spirituality of Christians," replied the clergyman. "Such things are, indeed, like Midian, a great host; not one giant foe to be overcome once and for ever, but a legion that incessantly harass, whether in the circles of society, or in the sacred, central point of home."

The last word recalled to Isa's mind the image of an invalid brother, left in dull loneliness; and a slight, scarcely audible, sigh, told of a secret emotion of self-reproach and misgiving.

CHAPTER IX.

ON Friday evening Mr. Eardley, in the cottage of Holdich, went on with the history which he had chosen as his theme.

LECTURE III.

FAITH IN OBEDIENCE.

We are to-day to examine faith in a further state of development. If only the green leaves of hope appear, if—as with the barren fig-tree in the parable—there be no fruit, or promise of fruit, hope itself becomes but self-deception. *Why call ye Me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?* asked the Saviour; *If ye love Me, keep My commandments.* Faith must blossom into obedience, as we see the fruit-trees in our orchards now bursting into brightness and beauty. Yes; obedience is the blossom, and the essence of its fragrance, *self-denial.* In heaven, obedience is ever a source of delight; but in a world of sin like this, it must, sooner or later, involve a sacrifice of the human will to the divine. Sweet to our Lord is the fragrance which rises like incense when the lips of his servant—tempted and

tried—can echo the words once breathed from His own to His Father in heaven, *not as I will, but as Thou wilt.*

Gideon had received a promise from the Lord: it was linked—as God's promises ever are—with a command. That night the Lord thus spake to the son of Joash: "Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that is by it; and build an altar unto the Lord thy God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place, and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down."

Many difficulties lay in the way of the execution of such a command, and obedience to it must be fraught with great danger. We should not have marvelled had we found that Gideon had pleaded to be spared a part at least of the painful task assigned him. He was not of the tribe to which pertained the service of the sanctuary; he had—under ordinary circumstances—no right to offer such a sacrifice to God. His own father was an idolater; was it for Gideon to destroy what a parent had set up, to draw down upon himself, as might be expected, the severe displeasure of that parent, and perhaps involve Joash in the peril to which he himself would be certainly exposed? Then—as Gideon might have anxiously reflected—as it would be impossible for him by the

strength of his single right hand to cut down a grove, destroy an altar, and build another as God had commanded, where was he to find comrades trusty enough, and bold enough, to help in the perilous work?

Gideon is not represented in the sacred narrative as a man likely to rush heedlessly upon an enterprise of difficulty and danger, and such thoughts as I have suggested are likely to have passed through his mind. They would have led many in his place to frame excuses, or at least to interpose delays. But we hear not of Gideon doing either. A direct command had been given; simple unquestioning obedience followed. Gideon took ten men of his servants, and did as the Lord had said unto him. Conscious of danger to be apprehended, not only from the Midianites and the men of his own city, but even from the household of his father, the son of Joash chose the night-time to accomplish his task. Under the cover of darkness, when other eyes were closed in sleep, Gideon and his companions felled the trees of the grove, cast down the altar of Baal, and raised another to Israel's God. They led thither the appointed sacrifice, slew the bullock, and set fire to the wood, from whence the smoke of the burnt-offering rose towards heaven. That was a busy, an eventful, and must have been an anxious night to Gideon. By so decisive an act, he had indeed drawn the sword and thrown the scabbard away.

The deed was done, the match was laid to the train, and Gideon must have awaited in anxious expectation the explosion which was certain to follow. The morning's light revealed the work of the night; the idolatrous men of the city beheld the altar of Baal laid low in the dust, and from mouth to mouth passed the question, "Who hath done this thing?" If Gideon had entertained any hope of concealment, that hope was a brief one: either one of his comrades had turned informer, or some lurking spy had witnessed his act, or, as seems more probable, he had already won such a character for uncompromising fidelity to his God, that suspicion instantly fixed upon him as the man who had dared to cut down the grove, and destroy the idol-altar. "Gideon, the son of Joash, hath done this thing."

Then rose the furious cry for blood from the enraged worshippers of Baal! They demanded the life of the man who had dared to insult their god!

The Almighty raised up a protector for Gideon. It was the altar of an idolatrous father which he had cast down, and we might have expected the fury of Joash to have been turned against him, but the hearts of all men are in the hand of the Lord, and we find Joash suddenly in the character of a defender of his son's bold act. Many a prayer may have risen from the depths of Gideon's soul when he beheld his father—a descendant of Abraham—

debasing himself by worshipping Baal. His own noble deed seems to have had the effect of opening the eyes of his parent to the folly of bowing down to an idol that could not protect his shrine from insult. With spirit and courage Joash faced those who would have sacrificed to vengeance the life of his son. "Will ye plead for Baal?" he cried, "will ye save him? He that will plead for him, let him be put to death whilst it is yet morning; if he be a God, let him plead for himself, because one hath cast down his altar!" and Joash called Gideon Jerubbaal, "let Baal plead," in mockery of the false god to whom he himself had once bowed down.

We are not directly told what was the effect of Joash's speech on the men of his city, Abiezer, but we can easily gather what it was from the recorded fact that on Gideon's blowing a trumpet they were the first to rally around him; they who had demanded his blood now acknowledged him as their leader. A spirit of patriotism appears to have been suddenly roused in Israel, and the people, in throwing off the bonds of superstition and idolatry, rose also to shake off the fetters of their earthly oppressors. Messengers were sent by Gideon throughout Manasseh, and to Asher, Zebulon, and Naphtali. From the slopes of Hermon and Tabor, from the shores of the Lake of Gennesareth, from the banks of the Jordan, from that northern portion of Canaan in which, in after times, the Saviour spent the years

of His boyhood, hastened the liberators of Israel at the call of their Heaven-appointed chief. Nor was the enemy idle. The Midianites, the Amalekites, and the children of the East gathered together, and pitched in the valley of Jezreel. That valley and the country adjacent are full of historical associations of deep interest. Jezreel appears to have been in the centre of the great plain of Esdraelon or Megiddo, which is bounded on the north by the mountains of Galilee, on the south by those of Samaria, and in which flow the waters of Kishon, "that ancient river" which swept away Sisera's hosts. Well might the triumphant song of Deborah here recur to Gideon, to brace up his soul for the coming conflict. He saw around him the warriors of Zebulon and Naphtali, the tribes who, under Barak, *jeoparded their lives unto the death in the high places of the field.* Joash himself may have been one of the heroes who had *willingly offered themselves* to oppose the might of Sisera, and may have heard from the lips of the prophetess the strain of triumph which closed with the words, *So let all Thine enemies perish, O Lord: but let them that love Him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might.*

And now we behold the young Manassite, who was so lately threshing corn alone by the wine-press to hide it, a general at the head of an army of thirty-two thousand men. Such success, such a blessing had followed on faith shown in obedience! And here let

us leave Gideon, and apply to ourselves the lesson conveyed in his marvellous story.

Every command of our heavenly Master, my brethren, is as a treasure-casket, to be opened by the key of obedience grasped in the hand of faith. The casket may to our eyes look hard and repulsive, the Tempter may seek to persuade us that we shall either find it empty, or filled with bitterest gall. But *wait on the Lord, and keep His way, and He shall exalt thee. The blessing of the Lord it maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow with it.* Look at Noah, employed during *a hundred and twenty years*, amidst the mocking and scorn of a most wicked generation, in building an enormous ark in obedience to God's command. What did he find at last in it to reward his labour of patience, his obedience of faith? Present deliverance from death for himself and his family, and the sceptre of a renovated world! Remember Abraham and his anguish when he received the mysterious command to sacrifice his son—the son whom he tenderly loved. Did not the Tempter urge him in that awful hour to cast away his obedience, to turn from a command which to human nature appeared so hard? The hand of faith might tremble, but it refused not the awful task; and what lay enclosed within the dreaded command? A treasure compared to which earth's crowns are but baubles, and all its riches—dust! The promise of a Saviour to spring from Abraham's

line, in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed!

We also have before us commands enclosing blessings reserved for those to whom grace is given to obey God's will through the power of faith. In the difficult task appointed for Gideon we may trace an emblem of that set before every individual who bears the name of Christian. There is first the altar of Baal to be thrown down; *self* must be dethroned from its shrine, the heart's idolatry must be renounced, and who can say that to yield up self-will is not as difficult a duty as that which Gideon performed on that eventful night at Ophrah? There is also the grove to be cut down, a type of those things lawful and even beautiful in themselves, but which become to us snares if they stand in the way of duty, if they hide from us heaven's light. God hath given to us all things richly to enjoy, but if the gifts make us forget the Giver, if they cause us to neglect appointed duties, they are as the goodly trees by the altar of Baal, whose wood was to be used as fuel, and not reserved for shade.

Thirdly, there is the altar to be raised, the appointed sacrifice to be offered. I need scarcely remind you, my friends, that in this sacrifice there is *nothing of atonement*—the blood of Christ, and that blood *alone*, has power to cleanse from sin, or to reconcile the sinner to God; yet is the Christian permitted, yea *commanded*, to offer himself a living

sacrifice, *holy, acceptable unto God.* As Gideon was not of the priestly tribe, and yet was given special grace to perform the priestly office, so the Lord deigns to make of His ransomed servants *a royal priesthood* as well as *a peculiar people.* Christ's sacrifice was the Sacrifice of Atonement; the sacrifice of His saints is that of thanksgiving. *The offering of a free heart will I give Thee, O Lord, and praise Thy name.*

To each one amongst us to whom a present Saviour has been revealed by faith, the word of the Lord hath come as to the son of Joash. We may have rejoiced in the *promise,* but have we obeyed the command? Let us be honest with ourselves, my brethren: if the altar of Baal be yet standing, can we hope to drive the Midianites out of the land? Faith, if *real,* must appear in obedience, *show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works,* saith the inspired apostle. I commend the subject to your earnest attention. Let each search and try his own heart, and compare his life with the law of his God. Let each remember that even *every thought* must be brought captive to the obedience of Christ, through the aid of the Holy Spirit, without whom we can do nothing pleasing to the Lord. I cannot better close our meditation on this subject than by repeating the words of our Redeemer in His Sermon on the Mount:—*Whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them, I*

will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

CHAPTER X.

OPENING THE CASKET.

AFTER the close of the service, Isa, as before, spoke to her little black-eyed maid, and inquired after the health of Gaspar.

"Master has caught cold in his eyes, and he says it's east wind, and shuts himself up. He can't read, nor write, and he seems very dull-like," said Lottie whose own sunburnt face was bright with the anticipated holiday before her.

Isa sent a message to Mr. Gritton, and after exchanging a few words with Henry Eardley, left the cottage with Edith Lestrange. The little heiress thought her cousin unusually silent as they walked back to the Castle.

"Edith, dear," said Isa at last, "I am going to return to Wildwaste to-morrow."

"Not to stay there, I hope," cried Edith.

"Yes, to stay there," replied Isa, suppressing a sigh. "I feel that poor Gaspar needs me; I think that my right place is home."

"Perhaps it is," said Edith reluctantly. Unwilling as she was to part with her cousin, Edith's own

views were clear on the subject; the nearest relation had the nearest claim, nothing would have induced her to leave her own father when he needed the comfort of her presence. Edith thought it wrong to try to prevent Isa from doing what she would have thought it right to do in her place.

The baronet was not, however, so forbearing. When his niece announced to him her intention of leaving the Castle on the following day, he playfully but strongly opposed her resolution. Sir Digby justly considered that Isa's companionship was both a pleasure and an advantage to his child, while her lively conversation and intelligence made it also agreeable to himself. Sir Digby felt that his graceful niece was an ornament to his Castle, and would fain have ignored altogether her connection with "a low man retired from business, who had disfigured the neighbourhood by sticking up on the heath a cockney villa, which only wanted a swinging sign to be mistaken for a newly built public-house."

"Having you safe here in ward in this our Castle, we shall certainly not let our prisoner go, save on parole to return within two hours," said the baronet; "Edith, I commit the charge of our captive to you."

"But what if I am a warder not to be trusted?" asked Edith, with a smile; "what if I connive at the captive's escape?"

"Seriously, Isa," said Sir Digby, "you cannot think of going back so soon to that—that damp and

not very cheerful locality:" the baronet did not know how to designate the dwelling itself by any term combining courtesy with truth.

"Indeed, I must return to my brother," said Isa.

"You will stay over Sunday, at least. I have an idea—I believe that you like attending the service at Axe."

How greatly Isa enjoyed the Sundays spent with the Lestranges the baronet knew not. The devotional spirit which breathed through the church-service was refreshing and reviving to her soul. To Mr. Eardley Isa looked up as the most faithful of pastors, and the holiest of men; she met him not unfrequently at the Castle, and the deeper the knowledge that the young maiden gained of the sterling qualities of his character, the more she wondered that her eyes had ever been dazzled by unsubstantial tinsel, and the more grateful she felt to God for having preserved her from the effects of her own folly. Isa would probably have yielded to the temptation to "stay over Sunday," but for the reflections which the story of Gideon had suggested to her mind. The grove, emblem of things in themselves lawful and desirable, which become snares when they stand in the way of duty, might not Isa find its counterpart in the pleasures of Castle Lestrange? Isa thought of the throwing down of self-will, the sacrifice of inclination, and so resisted the kind

pressing of her uncle, and the more powerful pleading of her own wishes.

Edith ordered the carriage on the following morning to take her cousin to Wildwaste; she would herself accompany her thither. Isa would have liked to have asked her young companion to stay and spend the day at the Lodge, to brighten its dulness with her society; but in Gaspar's nervous and irritable state, Isa feared that a visitor might annoy him, especially on a Saturday morning, which was always given to accounts. Edith, with instinctive delicacy, removed any difficulty on the part of her cousin, by saying that she would not this time remain to pay her visit, but drive on beyond Wildwaste to return the call of some neighbouring family.

"While I am at Wildwaste, however, I should like just to look into the little school," said Edith, as she and her cousin were driving from Castle Lestrange.

"I have been into it two or three times," observed Isa, "I mean into the room in which Mrs. Collins teaches the girls; I have never yet ventured amongst the boys—the young savages who look so ragged and wild."

"Oh! they are polished gentlemen compared to what they were when Mr. Arthur first took them in hand, so Mrs. Holdich has told me," laughed Edith. "They were like a pack of wild dogs

delighting to torment and worry every creature unfortunate enough to come within their reach, from poor little unfledged sparrows to Mrs. Stone's son, whom they actually hunted into fits!"

"And Mr. Arthur found some one to bring them into a little better order."

"Nay, he set about taming them himself; he used to go every morning to play schoolmaster; the ragged little urchins thought it a grand thing to be taught by a gentleman like him. How good does constantly come out of what we call evil!" cried Edith. "Papa did so much dislike letting the dear old Castle to strangers, but if he had not done so, Wildwaste would never have had the blessing of an Arthur Madden."

"He must have had a kind, generous spirit," observed Isa rather dreamily, for every reference to the Madden family sent her thoughts back strangely to the past.

"A brave, noble spirit," cried Edith; "for I have heard that he stood so alone in his labours; instead of his family encouraging and helping him, he was laughed at and opposed—at least by his elder brother and sister. They would, I fancy, as soon have thought of going steadily to work as 'hands' in that great soap-manufactory, amongst all the smoke and horrible scent, as of teaching dirty, ragged, little 'roughs' their A B C in a shed! I cannot imagine Cora Madden touching one of the

Wildwaste children with the point of her parasol, and from what one hears of her brother Lionel—but I am getting into evil-speaking," said Edith interrupting herself. "There is the pretty little schoolhouse which it must have been such a pleasure to design and build. Papa says that when Arthur Madden returns to England, he will certainly ask him to pay a visit to the Castle, for such public spirit ought to be countenanced. But I daresay that Mr. Madden wants no praise—no honour from man—that he serves his heavenly Master in the spirit expressed in my favourite verses," and in her soft, almost childish accents, Edith repeated Bonar's beautiful lines:—

"Up and away like the dew of the morning,
Soaring from earth to its home in the sun,
So let me steal away gently and lovingly,
Only remembered by what I have done.

"My name, and my place, and my tomb all forgotten,
The brief race of life well and patiently run,
So let me pass away peacefully, silently,
Only remembered by what I have done."

Before Edith had concluded the verses, the carriage had stopped at the entrance to the little school-house, on the side appropriated to the girls.

"The hive seems to be empty," observed Isa, as she alighted. "I thought that work was always going on at this hour, but I hear no hum of voices from within."

A feeble wail was the only audible sound; after

tapping gently at the door, Isa entered, followed by her cousin, into the neat little school-room, which usually presented a scene of cheerful industry. Its only occupants were, however, the schoolmistress and the babe which she rocked in her arms. The poor woman looked haggard and pale from a sleepless night, her face bore the stamp of anxious care, and vainly she attempted to soothe the little sufferer that seemed from its wasted appearance not to have many more days to live. Mrs. Collins rose on the entrance of the ladies, still continuing to rock her sick babe.

"Pray do not rise, Mrs. Collins, I fear that your dear child is very poorly," said Isa, looking with gentle sympathy on the suffering infant.

The schoolmistress sank down again on her seat, and drew a heavy sigh as she answered, "The doctor thinks I shall lose her, I did not close an eye all last night; I really could not hold the school this morning, it is the first time that ever I sent the children away, but Mrs. Bolder has taken charge of even my own little boys, I could not bear the noise for poor baby." Mrs. Collins spoke apologetically, as one who fears that she is neglecting a duty; Isa's expression of sympathy encouraged her to proceed. "I am afraid that I shall have to tell the girls not to come to-morrow, my husband cannot undertake them as well as the boys, for neither of the rooms would hold all together."

"Have you to teach on Sundays as well as on weekdays?" asked Edith.

"Only for an hour before morning service, and another in the afternoon, Miss Lestrange. I'm sorry to give it up even for one Sunday, for few of the children ever see the inside of a church, and but for the school, as Mr. Bolder used to say, they would grow up like heathen." Mrs. Collins was still rocking the baby that, to her great relief, was at length dropping asleep in her arms.

"Shall I come to-morrow and take your class," asked Isa; "I have had little experience in tuition, but I could read to the girls, teach them hymns, and question them out of the Bible while you sit quietly upstairs nursing your poor little child."

The look of gratitude in the eyes of the anxious mother said more than her words, as she eagerly accepted the young lady's offer.

"And I will see if there is not something that I can send to do the dear baby good," said Edith, resolved to drive back and consult Mrs. Holdich on the subject.

The cousins left the school-room with a pleasant consciousness that they had lightened a heavy burden. To Isa, especially, the feeling was sweet. What she had heard of the labours of Arthur Madden had raised the thought in her mind, "Oh, that I could *go and do likewise*, that I too could leave a blessing behind, and be 'remembered by what I had done!'" At once a door of usefulness was

opened before her. Why should she not every Sunday relieve the hard-worked schoolmistress, and let the weary mother enjoy amidst her children what would then be a Sabbath indeed? Isa had for a few weeks taught a Bible-class in London; she liked the work, it gave interest to life, it took away the sense of weariness and emptiness which will sometimes creep over the spirit even of the lovely and young. Isa knew the task of tuition would be far lighter to her than it had been to the young man whose example was before her; she would go where she would be welcomed, amongst children already trained to some degree of order; she would have no opposition or ridicule to fear, for Gaspar, so long as she made no demands on her purse, was contented to let his sister do very much as she pleased. That brief visit to the school-room had to Isa changed greatly the aspect of life at Wildwaste. Her Sundays at least would not be joyless; she was permitted to do the Lord's work, she might hope for His presence and blessing. She had made a sacrifice of inclination by returning to Wildwaste, and she was beginning to see that even in that dreary place God might give her rich cause for rejoicing.

"Yes; I shall be happier even here, trying to please my heavenly Master, than at Castle Lestrange, with the feeling ever arising that I am seeking to please self alone."

It was this thought that made Isa Gritton bear

patiently the dull monotony of the home to which she had returned, and the wayward fretfulness of him whose society now replaced that in which she had found such delight. Though Gaspar's temper was more than usually trying, not once did a peevish tone betray irritation, not once did a frown furrow Isa's fair brow. For hours on the evening after her return, Isa sat reading aloud to her brother a work upon commercial statistics, in which she herself took not a shadow of interest. Certainly her mind wandered much from the book, and when at length she wearily closed it, Isa could not have recalled a single sentence which it contained. But she had been serving an invalid brother and not pleasing herself, and if this duty was less attractive than that of feeding the Saviour's lambs, it was equally that which He had assigned her, and it was fulfilled for His sake.

Mankind applaud great acts of munificence, costly offerings presented like those of Solomon in open day, in the sight of all; but by far the greater number of the sacrifices which God accepts are made, as it were, like Gideon's, in the night-time, in the obscurity of domestic life, where no praise is looked for from man. There is deep truth in the well-known lines of Keble—

> "The trivial round, the common task
> Afford us all we ought to ask,
> Room to deny ourselves, a road
> To lead us daily nearer God."

CHAPTER XI.

TIDINGS.

EARLY on the Saturday afternoon Lottie Stone, with her little bundle in her hand, tripped lightly over the common towards the cottage of Holdich, which lay embosomed within the woods of Lestrange. She was on her way to her parent's home, and pleasure winged her steps. There are few joys more keen and pure than those experienced by a young girl, like Lottie, returning to the family whom she loves, after her first absence. What though Mrs. Stone's dwelling-place was but a single room over a shop, with a tiny attic-chamber for her son, to Lottie there was still a charm in the word "home," for love and peace abode there. She clapped her hands for joy as the open cart in which she was seated rattled down the narrow paved street of Axe, and she caught sight of the ungainly figure of her only brother standing before the shop. Out sprang Lottie almost before the horse was pulled up, and in another minute she was locked in the arms of her mother.

How much had Lottie to tell; how fast she talked,

how merrily she laughed, as she sat at her mother's little deal table spread with unusual dainties, buttered muffins, and toast, and water-cresses from the stream. The washerwoman had "cleared up and made all tidy" for the reception of her daughter, and her son had decked the homely room with bunches of cowslips and daffodils. Deborah's care-worn brow seemed less deeply wrinkled, and her thin anxious face often relaxed into a smile, as her merry child talked over her first eventful month of service, playfully describing what at the time of occurrence had seemed to her anything but sources of mirth, her own petty troubles and ignorant blunders. Lottie's hearers drew from her recital that Hannah was a somewhat formidable task-mistress, that "Master" was not very easily pleased, that crockery at the Lodge had a peculiar tendency to slip out of clumsy fingers, but that "Miss Isa" was the kindest of mistresses, and that a smile from her seemed to smooth every difficulty away.

"Bless your dear heart, how your poor father would have liked to have heard you!" exclaimed Deborah Stone, as the merry girl at length stopped to take breath.

For the loyal heart of the deserted wife remained true in its allegiance. Perhaps memory had softened the past, perhaps it overleaped the years of bitter suffering on the one side and tyranny on the other, and Deborah only thought of her husband as what

he had been in the days of his wooing. However that might be, conjugal affection remained firm and bright like its pledge, the circlet on the wrinkled bony finger, the sole piece of gold which its owner possessed, and which no strain of poverty would ever induce her to part with. When Deborah knelt down in the evening to offer her simple little prayer with her children, very fervent was her supplication for one absent but never forgotten; where Abner was she knew not, what Abner was she had proved by bitter experience, but still "true as the needle to the pole" the hopes and affections of the injured woman still pointed towards her lost husband.

Sunday was an especially happy day to Lottie, it was such a pleasure to go to what she deemed her own church, hear her own pastor, meet again with her own companions in the Sunday school which she used to attend. She was only disappointed when the baronet's carriage drew up to the church-porch, not to see in it the bright fair face of her dear young mistress.

"A letter for you, mother," said Mrs. Stone's son, as he entered on the Monday morning the little room in which Lottie, humming a lively air, was helping her parent to clear away the remains of their early breakfast. As Mrs. Stone's receiving a letter of any kind was a quite unprecedented occurrence, Lottie turned with some curiosity to see what the missive could contain. It had come by a cross-country post,

for her brother pointed to the stamp-mark upon it, "Southampton."

"A letter for me—why, who would write!" exclaimed Deborah, gazing with a look rather of anxiety than of curiosity on the address, "To D. Stone, Wildwast," traced in a straggling, hardly legible hand, with "try Axe" written below by the postmaster, showing that her correspondent could not be aware that—years ago—she had changed her abode. It was no wonder that Deborah did not recognise that rude hand-writing, as she had seen it but once before when, in the parish register, she had scrawled her own signature beneath that of her newly-wedded husband.

"Oh! mother, do open it!" cried Lottie; "who knows whether it mayn't bring us news of poor father."

It was the same thought that had made the hand of Deborah tremble as she had taken the letter from her son. She tore open the envelope, and with anxious eyes glanced at the signature at the end of its enclosure.

"It is—yes—oh! the Lord is merciful!" exclaimed the poor wife, with something like a sob. Long experience of hardship and sorrow had so strengthened her nature to endure, that it was very seldom that Deborah gave any expression to outward emotion, but no one could have looked at her at that moment and not have read in every line of her countenance

that the depths of her soul were stirred, that the few scarcely audible words which escaped her lips came from the inmost recesses of a heart where sorrow had so long fixed its abode, that when joy came it startled and overpowered, like the visit of an angel.

"Mother, read more; oh! read every word!" cried Lottie, whose only emotions seemed those of hope and delight, while her brother looked bewildered and scarcely able to comprehend that that piece of paper, blotted and soiled, on which his mother's tears were falling, actually contained the writing of his father.

It was some little time before the trembling, excited woman could, with the help of her children, make out the scrawl, which read as follows:—

ANCOR INN, SUTAMTON.

DEAR WIFE,—I landed here last month. I bin vry ill 6 weeks; i bin in det, an cant git away *till i pais*, so send me *five punds* afor thusday in a letter, or i shall git in *gret trubel;* don't tell no one abuit me, most of all not mister Erdly, cause id be had up for that scrape—mind don't tell *no one*, but send mony *quick;* i hop to be a beter husband an father; it was all along of the drink; so no more fum yur loving ABNER STONE.

"Five pounds—how can I send him five pounds—I've not five shillings in the world!" cried Deborah, glancing around her, as if to see whether any

article in that scantily furnished room could, if sold or pawned, bring anything like such a sum, the fifth part of which she had never possessed at one time since her marriage.

"Five pounds!" repeated her son dreamily, as he slowly moved his fingers one after the other, apparently to aid his dull brain in making some mental calculation.

"We must send, oh! we must send the money!" cried Lottie, clasping her hands. "Dear Mr. Eardley might—"

"I couldn't ask him for another penny," exclaimed Deborah, "he has done so much already, and he has so many alooking to him, and then your father forbids me to tell him a word."

"If only Mr. Arthur were in England," sighed Lottie.

"You earns wages," said her brother abruptly, as if he had suddenly lighted on some fountain of wealth.

"My quarter's wages won't be due till next June," replied Lottie.

"Could your master do anything?" suggested Deborah; "it is said about here that he's rich."

Lottie shook her head with a very significant expression. "He may have plenty of money," she said slowly, "but I'm sure he don't like to part with it; there's nothing to be got out of he."

"Here's the baker's cart come for you, Lottie,"

cried her brother, who had sauntered up to the window.

Lottie hurriedly snatched up her bonnet and shawl. "I mustn't keep him; but oh! mother, if I could only think of any way to help father—" a loud summons shouted from below cut her short in the middle of her sentence, and quickened her movements.

"Pray, child, pray; God Almighty will show us some way," there was scarcely time for the parting kiss and blessing; Lottie hurried down into the street barely soon enough to prevent her impatient escort from driving away without her.

Very different were the feelings of the young servant girl on her drive from Axe, from those with which, two days before, she had entered the quaint little town. She replied at random to the jesting observations of the baker's boy, she seemed unable to understand the meaning of the words that fell on her ear, for her mind was so full of conflicting emotions that outer things could make no impression upon it. Lottie scarcely knew whether she was happy or unhappy, whether her inclination was to laugh or to cry. Her prayers had been answered—her lost father was found; here indeed was joy and cause for thanksgiving; but he was ill, in debt, needed money, and where was that money to be procured?

"I would work my fingers to the bone!" muttered Lottie to herself, as the cart rolled lightly along the

dusty high road, "but no working would bring more than the one pound due in June;" and thoughts of the new boots which would then be absolutely needed would intrude on the little maid's mind. "I can't go about Mr. Gritton's house barefoot; and then he says that I am to pay for all that I break, and, oh! the things *will* slip out of my hands! Would my dear young lady help me? but I must not tell even her that I want money for my poor sick father. Shall I say that mother's in trouble for rent?" The honest soul of Lottie recoiled from the artful suggestion of the Tempter, and she shook her head so emphatically in reply to it, that the baker's boy, who had been watching with amusement her earnest look of thought and her moving lips, burst out into a laugh which startled her into a consciousness that she was not alone.

"I say, Lottie Stone, what did you see in that thorn bush to make you shake your head at it so fiercely?" cried the lad.

"I was only a-thinking," replied Lottie.

"A penny for your thoughts," said her companion.

But the answer was such a heavy sigh, that the good-humoured lad saw that the little maiden was in no mood for jesting, and as she turned her head sorrowfully away, he left her in peace to pursue her reflections.

It was perhaps well for Lottie that she had not

much time for meditation after her arrival at the lodge. Hard work has served to relieve many an anxious heart, and Hannah took care that her little assistant should have her share, and much more than her share of the labour of the house. Lottie Stone had to pay by double work for her two days' holiday at Axe. Yet while she washed, and scrubbed, and tidied the rooms, the thoughts of the poor young girl were constantly recurring to her father, and she was revolving the difficult problem how it would be possible to procure five pounds to send to her father before Thursday.

While Lottie was laying the cloth for dinner, she could not help hearing the conversation going on between her master and his sister, relative to one of the children of Isa's Sunday class.

"I am certain that she is consumptive, and that Wildwaste is too damp for the poor little thing. I hear that the doctor has said that her only chance is to go to the hospital at Bournemouth."

"I've no faith in doctors," said Gaspar, applying to his snuff-box.

"If I myself had the means of sending her," pursued Isa, "I would never trouble you on the subject; but the expenses will be heavy, and my purse is light, and—"

"It will always be light if you go picking up every case that comes before you; you may throw away your money if you choose, but I shall certainly not

throw away mine," and, rising, Gaspar walked to the window, to put an end to the conversation.

The words which she had heard fell like cold vapour upon the heart of Lottie. "My poor dear mistress, though she is a lady, has a light purse, she cannot do what she wishes, she is obliged to beg her brother for money, and he refuses to give it! Ah! there is no use in my asking help from her. She has the will to do good but not the power; master has the power but not the will. People say as how he is rich; it don't look like it, when he's so angry at the candles being used so fast. I'm sure if I were rich—" and here the little maid's thoughts flowed on fast in a channel into which they had often wandered before—how much good *she* would do if she were rich; how much she wished that she had plenty of money; how strange it was that some should be rolling in wealth while others had scarcely bread enough to satisfy hunger. There are many through whose minds, as through Lottie's, such a current of reflection is wont to run; but the little servant-maid suspected that there was danger in giving it free course.

"I do believe that Mr. Eardley would say—could he know of what I am thinking—that I am letting those Midianites, Discontent and Distrust, into my foolish little heart. It do seem as if I was beginning to think everything wrong in God's world, 'cause I can't do what I want for father. If I can't ask

Miss Isa to help me, is there not One above whom I *can* ask, and who has both the power and the will to do me good? I needn't be hiding nothing from God; He knows all already. He has made poor father give up the drink, and has brought him back to England, and has helped him over his sickness, and now He can set him free from his debt. I must pray very hard, and pray in faith, and *pray without fainting*, and sure the answer will come at last!"

And so, while she pursued her household labours, as well as when she knelt by her bed-side at night; when the duster or the broom was in her hand, as well as when her Bible lay open before her, the simple-minded Lottie lifted up her heart to her Father in heaven, and found comfort and hope in resting her cares upon Him.

On the evening of the following day Lottie accompanied her mistress to the meeting at the cottage of Holdich.

CHAPTER XII.

LECTURE IV.

FAITH IN TRIAL.

AVERY remarkable trial was now to test the faith of Gideon. We left him in the proud position of the leader of an army of thirty-two thousand men; and we can imagine how the heart of the patriot would swell with thankfulness and joy, as the prospect of delivering his country by their means brightened before him,—how he would welcome the arrival of each brave band, and count up the increasing number of his forces.

Further encouragement was given to Gideon by miraculous signs vouchsafed to him by God in answer to prayer. "If Thou wilt save Israel by my hand as Thou hast said, behold," cried Gideon, "I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as Thou hast said."

Early on the morrow the chieftain arose, and sought the fleece where he had laid it. He found it heavy with moisture, though the ground lay dry

around it; and Gideon wrung out from the dripping wool a bowlful of water.

Yet Gideon ventured to beseech God to grant a reversal of this miraculous sign, in farther confirmation of his faith. "Let not Thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once: let me prove, I pray Thee, but this once with the fleece. Let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew."

Even as Gideon had prayed so was the sign vouchsafed; the soft dew lay on the earth around while the fleece remained dry.

It has been remarked, that in the fleece of Gideon we may see not only a sign, but also a type of Israel, the chosen people of God. The living water of divine truth, the dew of a peculiar blessing, rested upon the children of Abraham when the rest of the world was as a dry and thirsty land. Now—alas for those who rejected—who still reject their Messiah! The sign is reversed;—as a dry fleece the Jews remain in the midst of Christian nations, a marvel to the world; the dew which falls so richly around them rests not on them as a people. Oh, may God hasten the time when the Jews also shall receive the water of life; when they *shall look on Him whom they pierced;* and when God shall make use of them as His chosen instruments for the conversion of the heathen! Looking forward to that blessed time, St. Paul—himself a Jew—exclaims, *What shall*

the receiving of them be but life from the dead? Let us pray then, my brethren, for the dew of grace to fall upon the dry fleece, that Jerusalem, the city of the great King, may once more become the joy of the earth.

Gideon, strengthened by signs from heaven, and surrounded by the hosts of Israel, might now fearlessly and confidently await the conflict with Midian; but he was not only to do God's work, but to do it in God's appointed way. *Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts.* The Lord thus spake unto Gideon: "The people that are with thee are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against Me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me. Now, therefore, go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from Mount Gilead."

In making such proclamation, Gideon was obeying a command given through Moses (Deut. xx. 8), though it is possible that he might have omitted to do so without the special direction from above. Startling was the effect of the proclamation, and it needed strong faith in Gideon not to falter when the force of Israel began to melt away like a snowball, till more than two-thirds of the whole number had deserted the camp! Truly many had been called, but few were chosen. Where were those

who had so readily obeyed the call of the trumpet, and quitted their homes for the field of war? Of how many might it be said, *being harnessed and carrying bows they turned back in the day of battle.* They were not to share the glory, they had faltered in the moment of trial. Oh, brethren, may it never be so with us! May *the fear of man* which *bringeth a snare* never make us shrink back from the duty before us. What must have been the shame of those who had come to the gathering of the hosts of Israel, and who had then departed without striking one blow, when the rocks and mountains rang with the shouts of their conquering brethren, and the victory in which they might once have shared was won without them! *No man having put his hand to the plough* (or to the sword), *and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of heaven.*

The force under Gideon had now dwindled from thirty-two thousand to ten thousand men. Human wisdom would have deemed these all too few to oppose the multitudes of Midian encamped in the valley before them; but not so judged the God of Hosts. The Lord said unto Gideon, "The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there: and it shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go."

Gideon, in obedience to the command, brought down his forces unto the water, leaving the selection of the chosen band of heroes unto Him who readeth the thoughts of the heart. Doubtless the Israelites were thirsty from their long march in the heat of that sultry clime; by far the greater number threw themselves on their knees by the water, stooping down eagerly to drink; three hundred only lapped from their hands the cooling draught. And the Lord said unto Gideon, "By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand; and let all the other people go every man unto his place."

Mysterious command,—and yet was it instantly obeyed. Gideon dismissed the greater part of his forces, not to their homes, but to their tents. They had yet their appointed part to take; they would complete the victory; they would follow up the pursuit. It is not given to all to be foremost in peril or in fame. Some are called to do great things, to suffer great things for God; others have a humbler part to perform: they have to follow up the successes of their brethren, not to shine conspicuously as Christian heroes, but to do their duty steadily as Christian men. It is very possible that some bold spirits amongst Gideon's ten thousand may have been tempted to repine at being excluded from the glorious privilege of those who were to bear the brunt, and win the highest renown. And now the

zealous servant of Christ, kept back by sickness or some other dispensation from active usefulness for his Lord, finds it hard to realize the truth, "They also serve who only stand and wait." He fain would be in the scene of action; he fain would join in the glorious strife. Must he look on while others labour? must he stand still while others fight? My brethren, the place which our great Leader assigns to us is the right place, however humbling it may be to our pride. The submission of those who retired to their tents may have been as acceptable to God as the courage of those who remained to perform the perilous duty before them.

The truth which is especially brought to our notice in this remarkable portion of the story of Gideon, is the necessity that God should be given the glory of every high and holy work which He enables His people to perform. Israel was not to say, "Mine own hand hath saved me." Weak instruments were purposely chosen, that the honour of success might pertain unto God, and not man. And how often has the same lesson been taught in the history of the Church! Not the mighty—not the noble or the learned were appointed as the first to proclaim the gospel of salvation. When the lowly and illiterate—when fishermen from Galilee were chosen as leaders of the hosts of the Lord, who could not but own that their success was due to the power of the Spirit. It is right that we should

employ all lawful means to further God's work; but let us beware that we rest not in means; let us especially beware that we use no means that are not sanctified by His blessing. Had the ten thousand valiant men been led forward by Gideon against the foe, what would their number, what would their courage, what would their zeal have availed? Doubtless shameful defeat would have followed presumptuous self-confidence; and he who had rested on an arm of flesh have found that he had leant on a broken reed!

Christians are now not unfrequently placed in a position which may remind us of that of Gideon, when he found his forces melting away in the face of a formidable foe. In the midst of active labours for God, one is smitten down by sickness, his work is still to be done,—the power to do it seems taken away. Another, active in works of charity, suddenly loses the means of which he has made such liberal use, his resources dwindle like the army of Gideon, and he is tempted to cry, "O Lord, wherefore hast Thou crippled my usefulness? what I had, was it not devoted to Thy service?" My brethren, if the blessing of God be left behind, we may rest trustfully in the assurance that He will care for His own work. He can make the few victorious over the many. His blessing on a cruse of oil and a handful of meal made them a surer source of supply than the granaries of the wealthy. God hath not

forsaken, He would only humble and prove his servants, and teach them through trials of faith to look for success only to Him.

Were it not for our past experience that flowers must fade to make way for fruit, how sad would be the sight of the fading blossoms on a tree,—the petals strewed in the dust, their brilliant beauty departed! But we know that what is more precious is left behind, that on the bough remains the green germ of the fruit which shall renew the beauty of the tree, and give to it a value beyond what it possessed in the smiling days of spring. So see we faith in trial. Outward advantages may be taken away, sweet hopes may fall and wither, but if the fruit-tree be thriving and deep-rooted, harvest glory is yet to come. Job—stripped of property, children, health—might lament the day of his birth, and believe that his season of active usefulness was departed for ever, but through his very trials and losses he passed to greater glory and joy, and has become a fruitful source of blessing to the Church of God through many generations.

CHAPTER XIII.

A PROMISE.

"I AM sure that Mr. Eardley was thinking of Mr. Arthur Madden this evening when he spoke of active labourers for God being smitten down by sickness," observed Rebekah Holdich to her husband, after the little congregation had dispersed from the cottage.

"Mr. Arthur—I hope there's nothing the matter with him!" said Holdich, with a look of concern on his manly countenance. "The last news was that he had been ordained at Jerusalem."

"But I grieve to say that worse tidings came this morning to Mr. Eardley in a letter from Mr. Arthur's youngest sister, who has been nursing him in a dangerous illness. The doctors say that the climate does not agree with his health; he was ordered to England directly, he and his sister were to start by the very next steamer."

"It will be a real pleasure to see them again," observed Holdich. He was a man rather of deeds than words, so the simple sentence expressed a great deal more than it would have done from the lips of another.

"But Mr. Arthur may never arrive, he may sink by the way," faltered Rebekah, who was of a disposition naturally tender, and not very hopeful.

"Wife, he is in God's hands," said Holdich; "sick or well, on sea or on land,—he will be given what is best for him."

"Ah," thought Rebekah, "my husband is always one to see behind the fading blossoms the germ of the fruit. His is a faith that can bear wind and storm; he can trust not only himself, but (what I find so much harder to do) those whom he loves, to his God."

Mrs. Bolder, as usual, carried back to her suffering husband an account of the cottage-lecture.

"There's a word of comfort for me," observed Bolder; "maybe I'm like one of these nine thousand seven hundred Israelites sent back to their tents. They were not to be trusted to gain the victory, lest they should boast that their own strength had won it. God kept them in the background to keep them humble, but they were not rejected—no! Nor is many a poor sinner like me, though shut up from active work,—we shall yet be allowed to join in the shout, *Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

Lottie Stone had returned to the Lodge that evening with a very heavy heart. Her mind was far less occupied with the lecture than with the

tidings which she had heard of the dangerous illness of one of her earliest benefactors. Already perplexed and distressed as she was on account of her father, this new trouble had come on the little maid as a shock. The words in which Mrs. Bolder had communicated the news to her, "Have you heard that Mr. Arthur Madden is dying at Jerusalem," had struck like a knell on her heart. Already that young tender heart was bleeding from home anxieties and troubles of which Lottie could not speak even to the kind mistress for whose counsel and sympathy she yearned, and now this second blow seemed almost crushing. Her father in difficulties, out of which she could not help him, returning after the absence of years to his country, but sick, tied down by debt, unable to reach those who loved him; and now the generous friend of the family dying in a far-distant land, thoughts of all this were a most oppressive burden of sorrow to Lottie. Her mind was so full of its troubles that she was more than usually awkward and inattentive in service. She was unpunctual in bringing in tea, the milk-jug was empty, the plates forgotten, the water had never been boiling. Isa was a little displeased, Mr. Gritton was angry, and his peevish chiding increased the confusion of poor Lottie Stone. In her nervous haste in removing the tea-tray she knocked over a letter-weigher which had lain upon Gaspar's table. It fell with a clatter which made the invalid

start, and the various weights were scattered hither and thither, some on the boards, some on the piece of brown drugget which covered the centre of the apartment.

"The girl must have been drinking!" exclaimed Gaspar angrily, while poor Lottie went down on her knees to gather up the weights. Isa, pitying her confusion, said, in order to draw away the attention of Gaspar, "I have not yet told you of Edith's kindness; she has promised to send my poor consumptive girl to Bournemouth."

"I feel no interest in the matter," replied Mr. Gritton; "I wish that instead of hunting up cases outside the house, you would manage to keep a little better order within it."

Lottie rose from her knees after her search, and timidly placed the weigher on the mantel-piece. She had recovered all the weights belonging to it but one, the smallest of the set, and that in the dim light thrown by the solitary candle on the table, she had not been able to find. Lottie was nervously afraid lest her master should examine the small machine and find it imperfect.

"I will hunt for the little round thing in the morning, when no one is watching me," thought Lottie, "and I'll never rest then till I find it." The letter-weigher was the only elegant article which Gaspar's study contained, it had been a birthday gift from his sister, and had particularly at-

tracted the admiration of Lottie, who, in her simplicity, had taken the gilded ornament for gold. The loss of the little weight was to the young maid a sensible addition to her heavier troubles.

"If I can't find that little gold bit, what on earth shall I do?" thought Lottie, with the fear before her mind of having to replace an article of value unknown; "I daresay that it is worth half a sovereign, and master may say that the whole thing is spoiled by its loss. How shall I ever pay for it out of my wages, and just at a time when I would do anything to win more money for father? I'll get up early, so early to-morrow, and search every cranny in that room before any one else is about in the house."

Lottie Stone could hardly sleep that night from the many anxious thoughts which haunted her brain. She arose before dawn to hunt for the weight, crept out of her little chamber, and softly descended the stairs to the study. She opened the shutters, but the stars were glimmering yet in the deep blue sky, there was not sufficient light for her need. Lottie lighted a candle and began her search, under the table, the chairs, the fender, in every likely and unlikely place she hunted, but "the little gold bit" was not to be found.

"I'll move the table right to the wall, and pull up the drugget, maybe it has rolled under there," said Lottie to herself, exerting all her strength to

move the deal table, with Gaspar's heavy desk upon it, to the other side of the room.

To draw up the drugget was an easier task, and scarcely had it been removed when, stuck between two of the boards which had been covered by the cloth, Lottie to her great relief caught sight of the bright little weight.

She ran up to the spot, and tried to pick up the weight, but a foot had trodden on it and pressed it in firmly. Lottie pulled harder, and to her extreme surprise found that in moving the weight she also moved one of the planks between which it was jammed, while a previously imperceptible line crossed the breadth of three of them. Accident had discovered to Lottie a most carefully concealed trap-door in the floor, in the spot which was usually covered both by the drugget and the table. With some little trouble Lottie managed to raise it, and with wondering curiosity she peered down, still on her knees, into the dark vault below, into which there was a means of descent by a ladder. Stories that had been current in the hamlet then recurred to the mind of Lottie, stories of the caution and mystery used in the building of Wildwaste Lodge. She had never heard that there were cellars beneath it, and a concealed trap-door would be a strange kind of opening into one intended to contain only wine. As Lottie bent over the dark recess, candle in hand, the little gilded weight which she had

recovered slipped from her hold, and fell down into the vault below. It was needful again to search for it, and perhaps the young girl was not sorry for an excuse to explore a little further. Slowly and softly Lottie descended the ladder, carrying the candle in her hand. When she had reached the bottom, she found herself in a brick-built vault; the air felt damp and chill, moisture stains gleamed faintly on the walls. On the further side was a door, close to which the little weight had rolled. Lottie went and picked it up, and then pressed her hand against the door; it was not locked, but slightly ajar, and yielded to her pressure. Lottie could not resist the temptation of entering the inner vault. It had brick walls and floor like the first, but was not, like the first, perfectly empty. There were low shelves, on which was ranged all the family plate which Mr. Gritton had inherited from his father, silver candlesticks, salvers, and tureens, with curious old coins in cases, all looking dull and tarnished. There were also yellow canvas bags ranged in order; Lottie put down her candle, and, by a strong impulse of curiosity, raised one; it was very heavy in proportion to its size; she loosened the string round the mouth and glanced in—it was full of golden sovereigns! The black eyes of Lottie dilated—she could scarcely breathe—the hand which held the canvas bag trembled. The foolish young daughter of Eve had by her indiscreet curiosity put herself into a position

of sore temptation, she had given the enemy an advantage; he who had dared to breathe his deadly whisper in Eden, was present to tempt in that dark deep vault.

"What a world of wealth is buried here, wealth useless to its owner, useless to all the world! A few yellow pieces from one of those canvas bags would never be missed, while they would bring help to a long-lost father, bring him back to his home, fill the heart of a mother with delight." Nay, even the impious suggestion followed, "This discovery has not been made by chance. Providence has guided you here to give you the means of helping your parents in the time of their greatest need."

Well was it then for the tempted girl that prayer had become so habitual that she intuitively turned to her God for guidance, as a child might turn to a parent. Then her pastor's words recurred to her memory, "Let us especially beware that we use no means that are not sanctified by God's blessing." It was Lottie's duty, indeed, to make every effort for her parents, but God's work must be only done in God's way. His blessing could not rest on ill-gotten gold, and without that blessing what could come but misery and shame? Lottie's faith was in trial; she was called on to abstain from following the only course by which it seemed possible for her to rescue her father. It was not by low covetousness, but by the strong warm affections of the heart that the

Tempter was seeking to draw the simple child into guilt. It was a short, a painful struggle, and then faith rose victorious. "Oh, no! how can I do this thing and sin against God!" exclaimed Lottie aloud, and not trusting herself to look again at the bags of treasure, she turned suddenly round—and confronted her master!

Lottie started violently at the unexpected meeting with Gaspar; she then stood as if spell-bound, with her black eyes riveted on his; she seemed to have no power to withdraw them, no power to utter another word. The sight of Mr. Gritton's sallow, shrunken countenance, looking to her corpse-like in that dimly-lighted vault, exercised on the girl a kind of fascination, such as that which is attributed to the serpent's gaze.

Gaspar had been roused from sleep by the sounds made by Lottie in the search for the gilded weight. He never enjoyed the deep refreshing slumber of a mind at rest; the miser was haunted by the fears that are natural to one whose treasure is on earth, where thieves may break through and steal. Alarmed by the noise which he heard at an hour so unusually early, Gaspar had risen and partially dressed, his anxiety being increased by the recollection that he had forgotten to lock the door of the inner vault when last he had visited it, as he frequently did, in the night-time. It was an infirmity of Gaspar, perhaps originating in the shock caused

to him by the loss of the *Orissa*, to feel that his money was never so safe as when immediately under his eye; it was a satisfaction to the slave of mammon to sleep over his buried treasure. Mr. Gritton was, however, nervously sensitive to the danger of keeping large sums of money in an unguarded dwelling, especially in such a lawless neighbourhood as that of Wildwaste. He must hide from all the knowledge of the existence of hoards which would tempt the burglar. With this view Gaspar had caused vaults to be constructed with a special view to concealment; no one in Wildwaste knew of their existence. Mr. Gritton did what he could to appear before men as a gentleman of very narrow means; and though he had not succeeded in this, he had until now perfectly preserved the secret of a treasure kept under his house

It was with annoyance and alarm that Gaspar now found his secret discovered. He could not doubt the honesty of Lottie, whose words he had just overheard; he was relieved to find that his vault had been entered by no more formidable intruder; but he anxiously revolved the means of preventing the discovery from spreading further, and stood sternly regarding the trembling girl for what appeared to her a fearfully long time.

"You have taken nothing?" he asked at length; to Lottie his voice sounded hollow and terrible, breaking the painful silence.

"Oh, no, sir—you can search me—I never thought—" the girl checked herself in the midst of her sentence—"no, I mustn't say that, for I was tempted; but it was for my father."

"I never heard that you had a father living," said Gaspar.

"He is living, and in great distress, at Southampton."

"Hear me, girl," said the master sternly. "I believe—I know that you are honest, but I have no means of knowing that you are discreet; after what has happened I cannot suffer you to stay for one hour longer in this house." Seeing that Lottie looked aghast at this summary dismissal, Gaspar added more gently, "I am going to exact from you a most solemn promise that you will never utter to any being a word of what you have seen this day, or of the cause of your being thus hastily dismissed from my service."

"I must tell my mother," faltered Lottie, "or she will think that I have done something wrong; I never hide nothing from her."

"You must not tell your mother, nor your lady, nor any one," said Gaspar. "I will make it worth your while to keep silence."

"I don't think that I could keep it," said poor Lottie.

Mr. Gritton laid his hand on one of the canvas bags, unloosed it, and took out five pieces of gold.

"See here, Lottie Stone," he said sternly; "if you will not make a solemn promise to tell no one, I will at once give you up to justice as a person found lurking, at a strange hour and under suspicious circumstances, in a place where treasure is kept." He marked that Lottie's rosy cheek blanched at the threat, and went on, "If you will pledge yourself to the strictest secrecy, you shall take home these five golden sovereigns; and if in the course of a year I find that nothing has transpired either of the cause of your leaving, or of the existence of these vaults, I will give you five sovereigns more."

A flash of joy beamed on the countenance of Lottie. So intense was her desire to possess the very sum which her master offered to place in her hands, that to obtain it she would have been ready to sacrifice anything but her conscience.

"Oh, sir!" she exclaimed, "I will—I do promise. I will never say one word about this place, or what I have seen, or why you send me away—I will rather die than speak!"

"You promise before God?" said Gaspar solemnly, before he placed the money in the hand of the excited girl.

"I do, I do!" exclaimed Lottie, and her fingers closed over the gold. She felt that she had saved her father.

"Now go up, pack your bundle, and be off," said Gaspar; "and never set foot in Wildwaste again;

and remember that guilt lies on your soul if you keep not your promise to the letter."

"May I not stay till I can bid good-bye to dear Miss Isa?" pleaded Lottie.

"You may not stay an hour; I do not choose that you should see her; take your money and your clothes and be gone. Leave the candle; I will stay behind to make sure that all is right—and to lock the door," added Gritton, under his breath; "I will not neglect that precaution again."

Lottie, tightly grasping her dearly-won treasure, mounted the ladder, and re-entered the study through the trap-door. She hastily replaced the little weight on its gilded stand, and then ran upstairs to make her brief preparations for quitting Wildwaste for ever. Lottie soon put up her bundle, for her earthly possessions were few, and with it in her hand descended the staircase. Tears gushed from her eyes as she reached the door of Isa's chamber; Lottie could not help lingering there for a minute to breathe a prayer for the young mistress so dearly beloved. "Oh! shall I never serve her again, never listen to her sweet kind voice, never comb out her long soft hair! What will she say of me, what will she think of me—will she not call me the most ungrateful girl in the world?" Lottie's heart swelled at the idea, and it was with a low stifled sob that she turned away from the door.

She found her master in the hall, himself un-

fastening the bolts of the outer door. Mr. Gritton was impatient to have the girl out of the house, and beyond the temptation of communicating with any one in the hamlet.

"Your father is in Southampton—you had better join him there," observed Gaspar. "Remember your solemn promise of silence made in the sight of Heaven."

Lottie turned as she crossed the threshold, "Oh, sir—pray—at least—let my dear mistress know that—"

Gaspar would not listen, he closed the door in her face, and Lottie found herself alone with her bundle and her gold in the chill crisp air of early morning. A dim line of red in the east showed where the sun would shortly rise, but as Lottie hastened through the hamlet there was not the sound of a human voice to break the stillness; Wildwaste was still asleep; in the great manufactory the busy hum of labour had not yet begun. But on the common, where the night dews lay heavy on fern and furze-bush, the lark, an early riser, was already mounting on quivering wing, and pouring out his song of joy to greet the advancing morn.

CHAPTER XIV.

SUSPICIONS.

LOTTIE had proceeded more than half of her way to Axe before her mind could realize her strange position, and the difficulties in which it must involve her. Her first thought had been of her father, her next of her young mistress; but every step that Lottie now took seemed to open to her a new complication of troubles. She had lost her place, and how could she expect to find a new one while she was utterly unable to explain why she had so suddenly left the last? What should she say to Mr. Eardley, who had taken such fatherly care to provide for her welfare? Poor Lottie became so utterly perplexed by her troubles, her first secret weighed on her frank honest nature as such an intolerable chain, that she could hardly think of physical weariness or discomfort, though the distance to Axe was long to be traversed by a fasting girl; and ere Lottie came in sight of the quaint little town, a shower fell which wet her clothes through and through.

The world was beginning to show signs of being

astir as Lottie entered the High Street of Axe; tradesmen's boys were taking down their shutters, the milkmaid was passing with her pails; the rain had ceased, and the clear morning sun was gleaming on the windows of the houses.

"Why, Lottie Stone, what ever brings you here at this 'ere hour of the day?" exclaimed Mrs. Green, the cobbler's stout wife, over whose little shop Deborah had her lodging.

Lottie muttered something, she knew not what, as she hurried through the shop. She ran up the steep dark staircase, and entered the room of her mother, whom she found in bonnet and shawl, with an old carpet-bag in her hand, as if about to set out on a journey. Deborah started at the unexpected entrance of her daughter, all wet with the rain, and flushed with excitement and the fatigue of a long weary walk.

"Oh, mother, here, here's for father!" exclaimed Lottie, eagerly holding out the five sovereigns which Mr. Gritton had given her.

"It is from God!" cried Deborah; "He has sent it—praise be to His goodness! Lottie, I've scarce a minute to tell you of it, for I must be off to catch the train, but I'm a-going to Southampton myself."

"To Southampton!" echoed Lottie in surprise.

"Yes; there was another letter yesterday, not from my poor Abner, but from his landlord; your father's worse again—very ill; I've been a-borrowing,

and begging, and scraping, and I've just got money enough for the journey; but these here five pounds have come as a blessing from Heaven! Mrs. Green has promised to do the ironing, and to tidy up things while I'm away—"

"She need do nothing; I'm here, I've left my place," said Lottie.

"Left your place!" exclaimed Deborah, dropping on the table the five gold pieces which her daughter had brought.

"Left your place?" repeated Mrs. Green, who had followed Lottie up the stairs, and who now turned a very inquisitive look on the money which had so unexpectedly and unaccountably been added to her neighbour's little store.

Mrs. Stone had no time for questioning, though Lottie's few words had laid a fresh burden of care on her grief-worn spirit. On Mrs. Green's informing her that "she'd better be off sharp or she'd miss the train," Deborah caught up her money and her carpet-bag, bade a hurried good-bye to her daughter and son, and hastened off to the station. Mrs. Green remained in the little room, determined, as she said to herself, "to get to the bottom of the business."

"I say, Lottie," she observed to the weary girl, who was taking off her wet bonnet and cloak, "was it you as brought them 'ere sovereigns to your mother?"

"Yes," said the unsuspicious Lottie, wishing

heartily that the stout landlady would go and leave her to rest and collect her thoughts.

"You've hardly earned 'em yet as wages, I take it." The shrewd, sharp, questioning look of the woman put the young girl on her guard.

"How did you manage to get them, eh?" pursued Mrs. Green, peering into the face of Lottie with an expression of suspicion which covered that face in a moment with a scarlet flush of indignation.

"I can't tell you—what is it to you—I got them honestly, you may be sure of that," stammered forth Lottie, as she pushed back the black hair from her heated cheeks.

"Did your master give 'em to you? he's not the kind of man for that sort of thing, or the world does him injustice."

"Mrs. Green, would you be so kind as to leave us for a little," said Lottie desperately; "I am very, very, very tired, and—" she knew not how to finish her sentence.

The cobbler's wife did not seem in the least inclined to go. She shook her head gravely, looked hard at the girl, and then shook her head again. "Better be open at once, Lottie Stone, you know I'm your friend; I know all about your father, poor man! If you've been a bit tempted, and—"

"The money is honestly mine—every penny of it—how dare you say such things?" exclaimed the indignant girl.

"Well then, you've only to tell the simple truth how you came by it; there's nothing to flare up about," said Mrs. Green, putting her stout arms a-kimbo.

"I'm not going to tell nothing; I want to be left quiet," cried Lottie, who felt much inclined to burst into a passion of tears; while her simple brother looked on in surprise, rubbing his shock of hair, as he was wont to do when perplexed.

A third time Mrs. Green shook her head; solemnly, ominously she shook it. "Well," she muttered, "if girls will behave like that, after all the schooling, and praying, and preaching, and—" the rest of the observation was unheard by the Stones, as their landlady had left the room as she uttered it, slamming the door behind her. Lottie knew by her manner that the cobbler's wife was offended; and was convinced that within an hour the story of the five sovereigns would be spread all over Axe, as was already that of Abner's arrival at Southampton, Deborah, in her efforts to procure money for her journey, having found it impossible to obey her husband's injunction of secrecy.

"Lottie, how *did* you get all that money?" asked her brother, as soon as Mrs. Green's heavy clumping step was heard descending the stair.

"Oh, don't you be a-worritting me too, Steady!" exclaimed Lottie, calling the lad by a name which Arthur Madden had given to him in the class, and

which had clung to him, from its appropriateness, till it had almost superseded his own.

Steady was not wont to "worrit" any one, and least of all the sister to whose brighter intelligence he had habitually looked up through his clouded boyhood, and whom he heartily loved. He was easily silenced, but not easily relieved. He sat down by the casement to his usual occupation of cutting pegs, but ever and anon a heavy sigh came from the poor youth's breast.

"You're troubled about father?" asked Lottie, who was laying out the rough-dried linen which she was about to iron for her mother.

"I warn't a-thinking of father, but of that money," replied the lad in his slow, measured drawl: he had difficulty in putting even the most simple thought into words.

"Steady, surely *you* know me, *you* can trust me!" cried Lottie, with a swelling heart.

"I does trust you," said the lad emphatically, "but other folk won't;" and with another sigh he relapsed into silence.

Very sadly Lottie pursued her occupation of ironing. "Oh," thought she, "I wish that I could smooth away all these difficulties, as I press down the creases out of this linen! Father ill—Mr. Arthur dying—mother away—and then this dreadful, dreadful promise! Oh, that I never had made it!"

"Here's Mr. Eardley a-coming," said young Stone, looking out of the window.

For the first time the sound of her pastor's name was unwelcome to Lottie, for the first time in her life she dreaded an interview with the clergyman. What could she say to him, how explain what must appear so mysterious and strange?

Mr. Eardley crossed the road, and did not, as Lottie earnestly hoped, pass the door of the cobbler's shop. She heard his foot on the stair, his tap at the door of the room. Lottie laid down her iron, courtesied on the entrance of the clergyman, and remained with her eyes fixed on the ground, her fingers nervously twitching the linen which lay on the table beside her. She was not sufficiently collected to think of offering her pastor a chair.

"Lottie, I am sorry to hear that you have left your place," said Mr. Eardley. "You seemed to be so happy and contented when I spoke to you last Sunday, that I hoped that you would remain for many years at the Lodge, and become in time a valuable servant." Mr. Eardley's address was fatherly and kind, but Lottie's only reply was in the big tears which rolled slowly down her flushed cheeks.

"Come, my child, speak frankly to one who has your true welfare at heart. Did you displease your lady? or had you some little difference with your fellow-servant?"

Mr. Eardley paused for an answer, but no answer came.

"Oh, Lottie, speak out!" cried her brother, who had a child-like faith in the wisdom as well as the kindness of their pastor.

Mr. Eardley was both perplexed and distressed by the strange reserve shown by one whose disposition he had hitherto found clear as daylight. He had heard in an exaggerated form the story of the money which Lottie had brought from Wildwaste, and very painful suspicions began to arise in his mind. Yet the clergyman shrank at first from saying a word that might appear like a charge of dishonesty against one whose character had hitherto been without a stain.

"What did your lady say to your leaving her?"

"Nothing," was trembling upon the lips of the girl, but Lottie pressed them together, and kept silent. She was aware that if by answering questions she were led into telling anything, she would gradually be drawn into telling all; it was only by preserving silence that she could possibly preserve the secret which she had solemnly promised to keep.

"Lottie, why don't you speak!" cried Steady, in real distress.

"Miss Gritton appears to be so gentle and kind," pursued the clergyman.

"She's an angel! I'd die for her!" interrupted Lottie, fairly breaking down, and bursting into a fit of loud sobbing.

"Do you not think that, if you have displeased her, she might be persuaded to overlook a fault, and take you back?" suggested Mr. Eardley, glad that at least the girl's obstinate silence was broken.

"I can't go back!" sobbed Lottie.

"And wherefore not?" inquired Mr. Eardley.

"Lottie, do, do speak!" pleaded her brother.

The poor girl was in bitter distress. A false idea of honour has led many a duellist to face the fire of an enemy; but never did the most nervous spirit more shrink from such an ordeal than did that of the little servant-maid from that which she now had to pass through. Influenced by the highest sense of honour—conscientious respect for a promise—Lottie stood the mark of questions, each of which seemed to strike her in the tenderest part. She had more than filial reverence for her pastor: to stand well in his favour, to do credit to his care, had been one of the highest objects of her ambition; to grieve, displease, disappoint him was misery to which she could hardly have believed it possible that she should ever be exposed. Mr. Eardley, on his part, found the interview very painful. He had regarded Lottie Stone as one of the most promising girls under his pastoral charge; she was so simple-minded, affectionate, and pious; he could have trusted her with money uncounted; were she to prove ungrateful and unworthy, in whom could he henceforth trust? The clergyman was very patient and tender, but he was

also very faithful. For more than an hour he stood in that little room, plying the silent miserable girl with questions that put her to the torture, appealing to her reason, her affections, her conscience; exhorting, reproving, entreating, doing all that lay in his power to overcome her inexplicable reserve. Mr. Eardley saw that Lottie's character, that most precious of earthly possessions, was at stake, that if she continued silent, a merciless world would believe the worst. He explained this again and again, and Lottie, in anguish of soul, felt how true was every word which he uttered. And yet, had she not promised before God? was it not better to endure suspicions than to incur sin? Not all the efforts of her pastor, backed by the entreaties of her simple-hearted brother, could force the poor girl from the position to which conscience had fastened her, like a baited creature fixed to the stake.

At length, disappointed and disheartened, Mr. Eardley took his leave, promising, however, soon to return. Lottie wrung her hands in silent misery as she heard the door close behind him. "There," she thought, "goes the kindest, most generous of friends, wearied out at last, and thinking me an ungrateful and wicked girl! Oh, I could have borne anything better than this!"

Lottie was not to have even a breathing-space of relief. Not five minutes after the departure of Mr. Eardley, the baronet's carriage drove up to the door

of the cobbler's shop, with Isa and her cousin within. Its approach was announced to Lottie by her brother's exclamation, "Here comes your mistress a-looking arter ye now!"

"I think all this will drive me mad!" cried Lottie, pressing both her hands to her burning temples.

Isa had been much surprised, and even alarmed, on being informed by Hannah at an early hour that morning that "that there girl Lottie" had "run away without saying a word to nobody; taken her bundle, and gone clean off." Isa could in no way account for the sudden departure of her young servant, except by imagining that she had taken offence at something, and that perhaps something wild and gipsy-like in her nature corresponded with her somewhat gipsy-like appearance.

"To go without saying a word to me, kind and indulgent as I ever have been, seems so strange, so ungrateful," observed Isa to her brother, when she mentioned to him at breakfast a fact of which he had had much earlier notice than herself.

"No accounting for the vagaries of a raw, untutored village rustic," observed Gaspar, applying to his snuff-box; and he was ungenerous enough to add, in order to cover his own confusion, "You had better count up the spoons."

"I could answer for Lottie's honesty," said Isa.

So could Gaspar Gritton, for he had seen it put

to the proof; he had seen the "raw, untutored village rustic" withstand a temptation under which he, an educated man, calling himself a gentleman, had basely succumbed. But Gaspar felt himself placed in a position of difficulty. He would probably have at once told his sister all the circumstances connected with Lottie's dismissal, had it not been for Isa's having spoken to him on the subject of the *Orissa*. Gaspar shrank from avowing to one who, as he knew, suspected *his* honesty, that he actually had a large sum of money concealed in a vault.

"What could have induced the girl to take such a step?" said Isa, following the current of her own thoughts. "Hannah is as much in the dark as ourselves."

"Really," observed Gaspar peevishly, "the subject is not worth the trouble of considering. Such an insignificant cipher may go, or stay, or hang herself; it matters not the turn of a straw to us!"

A feeling of indignation swelled the heart of Isa, and it cost her an effort to give it no outward expression. Isa was not one of those who regard the humbler members of a household as mere pieces of furniture, to be discarded when faulty, or neglected when worn out, without a thought or a care. She looked upon them as fellow Christians and fellow immortals, over whom the position of master or mistress gives an influence for which an account must one day be rendered. Added to this, Lottie's

simplicity, warmth of heart, and the knowledge of her early trials, had engaged in her behalf the kindly interest of her young mistress: Isa's anxiety on account of her run-away servant was not only a matter of conscience, but a matter of feeling also.

After some minutes of silence, Isa exclaimed, as if she had suddenly found a clue for which she had been searching, "It must have been your words to her yesterday evening!"

"What words do you mean?" asked Gaspar.

"You said that she must have been drinking. Such a sentence, though lightly spoken, would wound her deeply, for she would think it an allusion to the well-known vice of her father, whom, poor child, she loves so dearly."

"Really," observed Mr. Gritton, with a short, harsh laugh, "we must be careful now-a-days where we blow thistle-down, lest it should wound some sensitive maid-of-all-work!" He was not sorry that Isa should suggest some cause for Lottie's sudden flight that was remote from the real one.

"I cannot rest till I know all, and have seen the poor girl," thought Isa; "I will go over to the castle at once, and ask Edith to take me in the carriage to Axe."

CHAPTER XV.

EVIL TONGUES.

"I WILL not go in with you, Isa dear," said Edith, as the carriage approached the little country town. "Lottie will speak to you more freely if no one is by. I hope that we shall be able to carry back with us to Wild-waste your run-away little gipsy maid."

"I am sure that we shall," replied Isa. "Lottie is an affectionate girl, and loves me. I must chide her a little, but gently; she is one with whom a short reproof will go a long way."

"And all your scourges are made of feathers, like those in the fairy-tale," said Edith with a smile, as the carriage rolled up to the door of Mrs. Green's shop.

Courteously declining the guidance of the cobbler's stout wife, Isa lightly ascended the stair to the lodging above. She entertained not the slightest doubt of succeeding in bringing back her truant; her only subject of consideration was how far reproof should be blended with kindness. Lottie's strange conduct had given her mistress just cause of offence;

it must not be overlooked, though in Isa's heart it was already forgiven.

The lady tapped at the door, and entered the room where Lottie stood trembling. Her face was buried in her hands; but Isa could see the red burning flush on her neck. The girl's attitude was so expressive of humiliation and grief, that her gentle mistress forgot at once all her intended rebuke.

"My poor Lottie, what has happened?" There was nothing but kindness and sympathy in the voice which uttered the question.

The tears trickled through Lottie's brown fingers; but she did not remove her hands or raise her head.

"What has happened?" repeated Isa, addressing herself to the lad, who had risen from his seat on the entrance of the lady.

Steady tugged hard at the button of his jacket; his nostrils dilated; he looked first to one side and then to the other, an image of dull perplexity. He jerked out the answer, "She won't tell no one," and then, unable to bear another interview like that which had just passed between his sister and Mr. Eardley, the poor lad shuffled hastily out of the room.

Isa went up to Lottie Stone, and gently laid her hand on her shoulder. "If you have had anything to pain and distress you, open your heart to me. I am not angry with you, Lottie, though you did

wrong to leave the house without giving notice. I am willing to take you back if you tell me frankly the cause of your going."

"I can't tell," replied Lottie in a choking voice.

"Something that was said distressed you, perhaps. Was it what your master spoke about drinking, when you threw down the weights last evening?

Isa's question suddenly opened for the young maid a little door of escape. The lady had found out a cause for Lottie's strange conduct, when she herself could give none. Would there be any harm in leaving Miss Gritton to think, and to lead others to think, that the whole strange affair had arisen from a burst of passionate feeling caused by an accusation which had been both unjust and cruel? A disingenuous girl would have gladly availed herself of the lady's mistaken view, and have left her to form her own conclusions from it. But Lottie had the straightforward simplicity of one in whose spirit there is no guile. She shook her head on Isa's repeating her question, and her mistress remained more perplexed than ever. Isa felt, as Mr. Eardley had felt, surprised, discouraged, and at length a little displeased. Lottie would neither apologize nor explain, nor consent to go back to her place. No sentence could be wrung from her lips but a repetition of "I can't tell," "I can never go back;" and yet her manner expressed fervent, grateful affection towards her young mistress. Isa was convinced

that the girl's obstinate reserve was not that of indifference or of pride.

"Lottie, you quite grieve me," said Isa at length, as she turned to depart, lingering at the open door with her fingers on the handle, to give the girl an opportunity of calling her back.

Lottie clutched her own black hair with both her hands, and tore it, as if physical pain could relieve the anguish of her heart. She turned suddenly away to the window, to escape as far as she could from the presence of her lady. Edith, waiting in the carriage below, chanced to glance up at the moment, and caught sight of a young face clouded with an expression of such misery as she had never seen on a countenance before.

In the meantime, Mr. Eardley having resolved, if possible, to clear up the mystery, and at least ascertain whether poor Lottie were not unjustly accused of dishonesty, walked over to Wildwaste Lodge. He was much disappointed at not finding Miss Gritton at home, but asked for an interview with her brother.

"Master ain't very well, he don't see visitors," said Hannah, who, grumbling at being left to do all the work of the house, had come out from the kitchen smoothing her soiled apron and pulling down her tucked-up sleeves.

"I have walked from Axe, being anxious to speak on a matter of some importance," said the

heated and weary clergyman. "Pray, ask Mr. Gritton to have the kindness to see me but for five minutes."

Ushered into the study, Mr. Eardley almost immediately entered on the object of his visit. Gaspar was embarrassed; he had not contemplated the difficulties which must arise from Lottie's faithful adherence to her promise.

"Really, sir, I can't be answerable for—I can't be expected to know anything about the doings of a girl like Lottie." Gaspar took a large pinch of snuff to cover his embarrassment.

"But what I am most anxious to ascertain is this: has anything been missed here, is there the slightest cause to suspect the young girl of dishonesty?" Gaspar could not meet the gaze of the clear eyes that were fixed upon him.

"No; she's no thief; she's awkward, ignorant, but honest—yes, perfectly honest." The words were spoken as if with effort, and again Gaspar had recourse to his snuff-box.

"That is a great relief to me; that is what I wanted to ascertain. I thank you, Mr. Gritton," said the clergyman, rising; "I need not longer intrude on your time."

As Mr. Eardley was about to depart, Isa returned from her fruitless expedition to Axe. To her the presence of the vicar was ever welcome, and more than usually so at the present moment. She eagerly

related to him all that had happened, as far as her knowledge extended, emphatically confirming Gaspar's testimony as to the perfect honesty of poor Lottie.

The interview did not last as long as either Henry Eardley or Isa would have wished, as Hannah came clattering in with the tray to prepare for early dinner. It would have been an act of common courtesy to have asked the weary minister to stop and partake of the meal. Isa glanced at her brother, without whose assent she dared not give the invitation which was upon her lips, but Gaspar did not choose to understand the look; hospitality was foreign to his nature, and to his sister's mortification he suffered the tired guest to depart unrefreshed.

Henry Eardley left the Lodge with a joyous feeling of a more complicated nature than would have arisen only from satisfaction at having been relieved of painful doubts in regard to a member of his flock. His thoughts were by no means absorbed by the case of Lottie, though he went out of his way to let it be known in the cottage of Holdich, and in various dwellings in Axe, that the young maid had not been dismissed for any fault, and that she had taken nothing with her that was not honestly her own.

Mr. Eardley did what he could to clear the character of Lottie from the imputation resting upon it; but it is as easy to force back an overflowing river

into its usual channel as to stay the flood of calumny when once it has spread far and wide. The vicar could not throw light on the mystery of Lottie's hasty flight from Wildwaste, or her possession of a considerable sum of money for which she would not account.

"Folk may talk till they're black in the face," said Mrs. Green to her neighbour the baker, "but they can't talk away them five bright sovereigns as I seed with these eyes. Girls can't make gold pieces out of old tea-leaves; and if any one gave 'em to her, why don't she say so at once?"

Young Stone returned to his lodging that evening with a black eye and a great swelling on his brow.

"Oh, Steady, you have had one of your falls!" exclaimed Lottie, with affectionate sympathy.

The lad's face was working with suppressed emotion. He sat down heavily, and passed his hand through his mass of shaggy light hair before he replied in his slow, peculiar drawl,—

"Bat Maule says—says he—you took fifteen pounds from your master's desk, and he was a-goin' to send you to jail, only Miss Isa begged and prayed, and so he let you off."

It was a long speech for the lad to utter; his drawled-out words fell on Lottie's ear like the drip, drip of water, which is said at length to produce madness in the victim on whose head it descends.

"And what did you say?" exclaimed the miserable Lottie, starting up from her seat.

"I didn't say nothing, I knocked him down," replied Steady; "but he did the like by me."

The lad pressed his rag of a handkerchief against his bruised and swollen forehead—the stain of blood was upon it.

"Hurt for me!" moaned Lottie, whose courage was beginning to give way under her complicated trials.

"I wish you'd clear up about that money," her brother went on, "'cause I can't knock down all them folk as talk, and I can't stand hearing 'em call you a thief."

Lottie went up to the lad, threw her arms round his neck, and sobbed on his shoulder.

"Don't take on so—don't take on so," said poor weak-witted Steady, almost beginning himself to cry in his rough sympathy with his sister. "I trust you, Lottie, you ain't no thief; but why—why won't you clear up?"

And still that painful silence had to be maintained, that cruel promise had to be kept. A hundred times was Lottie on the point of breaking it, but simple faith kept her firm in temptation. To break her word would be to disobey her Lord; it was better to suffer than to sin. "But, oh!" thought Lottie, "it's a blessing that mother is away; how could I have kept any secret from her!"

Poor Steady's rude championship of his sister had been worse than useless; it only, as was the case with any violent excitement, brought on one of his sudden attacks, which, though very brief in duration, were always distressing, and very painful to witness. Sleep, however, soon removed from the afflicted lad all consciousness of earthly trouble; but for Lottie there was no rest throughout all the night. She heard the church-clock strike every hour as she lay on her pallet-bed, almost too wretched even for tears.

"But, oh," thought the poor girl, "it's such a comfort that there is One who knows all; He knows that I did no wrong, except—except in letting curiosity lead me on, and touching that bag of gold, and thinking those wicked, covetous thoughts. But He has forgiven me—I feel that He has, though He lets me suffer for my folly. It seems as if all my friends and my comforts were being a-taken from me together. Mother away—father ill—Mr. Eardley and my dear lady vexed and displeased—all my neighbours turning against me—even poor Steady scarcely knowing what to think of me, though he will never desert me. It is just as Mr. Eardley said in his lecture, all my blossoms are falling from the tree." The idea linked itself on to others connected with Gideon when his faith was in trial, when, just before the struggle with the foe, he was constrained to deprive himself of the help of those on whose support he had counted. "It must have seemed

strange and hard to him," mused Lottie, "to have had the greater part of his friends sent from him, with all these fierce enemies gathering in front. Now it seems as if my Midianites were getting stronger than ever, and I more helpless against them. There's dreadful Disappointment, and worse than Discontent, and I seem at Dissension with all my neighbours, though I never willingly did them wrong; and as for Distrust, 'tis just crushing me down, for I can't see any way out of my troubles, and it looks as if the Lord had forsaken me. And now those of whom I would have said, 'They will always comfort and care for me and trust me,' are those who cause me most grief and pain. They are still good, patient, and kind, yet I have, as it were, to send them from me, and struggle with temptation alone. But God gave victory to Gideon in a way that man would not have thought of. It was not to make him really weaker that he was deprived of his friends; I suppose that it was to make him rest more entirely on God. Perhaps that is why a poor child like me is left so desolate now. I look to this side, and to that side, and no one seems able to help me; and then, when there's hope nowhere else, I look up straight to my God. I should like to hear more of what happened to Gideon. I think that I could walk to Mrs. Holdich's cottage on Friday with Steady, who goes whenever he can. It would be dreadful, indeed, to face all the people; do they not

look upon me as a thief! And yet," said the poor girl, half aloud, raising herself on her elbow, as the first morning ray glimmered through her casement, "I should like to show to all that I am not ashamed, that I dare show my face before my accusers. I should like Mr. Eardley to see that I prize his holy words—for, oh! I need them—I need the comfort and strength which only religion can give. It would be a pleasure, too, to look on the face of my sweet young mistress; I would not speak to her—oh, no—but I do so long to see her; and I would quietly slip away as soon as the prayer was done."

The resolution thus taken seemed to calm the mind of Lottie, or perhaps nature at last was claiming her rights, and sorrow of mind gave way to overpowering weariness of body. Deeply and peacefully the young girl slept, with her hands folded as if in prayer.

Lottie rose with a brave spirit, though a heavy heart; she was resolved to seek comfort in a clear conscience toward man and a humble confidence in her God, however painful might be the struggle before her. Lottie did not sit down in idle sorrow, though she shrank from quitting her lodging; for wherever she went she would have to encounter suspicious looks and cruel taunts. The young maid read her chapter, and said her prayers with her brother, and after giving him his simple breakfast, set resolutely to work to prepare, as she said, for her parents' return. The room was thoroughly washed

and scrubbed—even the window-panes cleaned; and when the little place had been made the picture of neatness, Lottie turned to mending her brother's garments, in which many a darn and many a patch showed the skill of her busy fingers. The most trying event of the day to Lottie was a second long interview with her pastor; but she again resisted the almost overpowering temptation to pour out her whole heart to him, and to tell him all that had happened. It was a satisfaction to find that Mr. Eardley had no suspicion of her honesty, notwithstanding the mystery regarding the money, and that Miss Gritton had never doubted that honesty for a moment. Lottie saw that the clergyman was now rather perplexed than displeased by her reserve; and when, with her honest eyes looking full into his, she assured him that if he knew all he would not blame her silence, it was a relief to the poor child to feel that he had not lost faith in her word.

Friday brought no tidings from Southampton. Lottie felt keenly "the sickening pang of hope deferred," and she had now but little occupation wherewith to fill up the tedious hours. The day passed slowly and wearily, till it was time to start for the cottage-meeting. Glad was Lottie to leave Axe, though only for a space so brief; the cottage of Holdich was connected in her mind only with thoughts of holiness and peace, and she was thankful to be permitted still to kneel as a worshipper there.

CHAPTER XVI.

LECTURE V.

FAITH CONFIRMED.

THE Lord is mindful of His own, He remembereth His people. He may indeed permit faith to be put to sharp trial, but His love supports His servant through it. If, as in the case of Gideon, God removeth earthly friends; if He take from us the prop of human aid, He can supply other props, and even from the enemy's camp. When friends are silent, encouragement can come from the lips of a foe. A Balaam, eager to curse, has been made an instrument to bless.

Strong as was the faith of Gideon, we cannot wonder if a feeling of misgiving arose in his mind when he looked on the handful of men to which his force had been reduced. How was it possible that they should meet the shock of battle with the multitudes of Midian? They were brave and resolute men, they would follow him to the death; would it not be indeed *to the death;* had he not been selecting victims for slaughter rather than warriors for conquest? We must conclude that some such thoughts

as these troubled the spirit of Gideon, from the very circumstance of God's finding it needful thus to strengthen his faith:

"Arise, get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered it into thine hand," said the Lord. "But if thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah thy servant down to the host: and thou shalt hear what they say; and afterward shall thine hands be strengthened to go down unto the host."

It could not have been personal fear that weighed upon the soul of Gideon; his anxious care must have been for the safety of others, for the success of the effort to free his country, or formidable would have appeared the adventure which he was called to undertake almost alone. But Gideon appears to have had no hesitation or fear in trusting his own life to God's providential care. We picture to ourselves the leader, with his single attendant, silently treading the path towards the enemy's camp, lighted by the glimmering stars in the dark blue midnight sky. How wide spreads the camp of Amalek and Midian, how innumerable seem the dark tents within which are slumbering foes, "like grasshoppers for multitude," with their camels tethered around, "as the sand by the sea-side for multitude." Nor are all amongst the host sleeping: Gideon hears the sound of voices in converse as he approaches the tents. The man of God stands still, as conscious that what he will hear will be a message from God to himself.

"Behold, I dreamed a dream," said one of the Midianites to his companion, little guessing on whose ear his words would fall; "and, lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along.

"And his fellow answered and said, This is nothing else, save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel: for into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host."

The message from the Lord had been given, and Gideon required no more. There, close to the unconscious enemy, he worshipped; then returning with renewed faith and hope to the warriors of Israel, he cried, "Arise, for the Lord hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian!"

Brethren, are we to look for such encouragements now? The age of miracles, it may be said, is past; we must rest upon what has already been revealed, nor seek for wonders and signs to encourage our feeble faith. Yet, without interrupting the course of nature, God has His own way of giving strength to the weak and joy to the sorrowful. An instance of this, which occurred during the fearful Indian mutiny, suggests itself to my mind. Two ladies and a child were prisoners in the power of the cruel enemy, who had destroyed the brother of one of them by blowing him from a gun. Great must have been the anguish of mind, the fears of these captive ladies

—they were encompassed, as it were, by the hosts of Midian; could faith endure the fiery trial? The child fell sick, medicine was asked for, and the captors gave it wrapped up in a soiled piece of paper. Who would have guessed that through the enemy of our name and of our faith would be sent medicine not only for the body but the soul? With wondering joy the ladies discovered that the scrap of paper was a leaf torn from an English Bible, and containing such a portion of Scripture as was most exactly suited for their comfort and refreshment. With what emotions must the poor prisoners have received such a message from God as this, conveyed through the enemy's hand: *I, even I, am He that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; and forgettest the Lord thy Maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor? The captive exile hasteneth that he may be loosed, and that he should not die in the pit, nor that his bread should fail* (Isa. li. 12–15).

Doubtless these captive Englishwomen received those blessed verses as a promise from God, even as Gideon did the Midianite's relation of his dream, and in their dreary prison bowed their heads and wor-

shipped. The ladies were delivered from the fury of the oppressor; the captive exiles were loosed; and surely with them, as with Gideon, would faith be confirmed, not only for the present time of peril, but through all the succeeding years of life.

When we regard faith, as we have been doing during this course of brief lectures, under the emblem of a fruit tree, we must remember that it is no standard rearing itself aloft in the pride of its strength, but a plant in itself but feeble, which must lean on the Rock of Ages; which, even when its branches are fullest of swelling fruit, needs the props, the supports which God's grace only can give. Without these supports how the branches would lie low on the earth, their fruit be defiled with its dust! How constantly in the history of God's people do we find strong consolation given at the moment when faith is most ready to fail! To Jacob, a lonely, benighted wanderer, is sent a bright beam of heaven. Does he fear to encounter an angry brother? the angel of the Lord meets him and blesses. Joshua, ere commencing an arduous campaign, receives the promise, *I will not fail thee nor forsake thee.* To David comes the assurance of his final triumph from the lips of the very enemy engaged in hunting for his life: *I know well that thou shalt surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in thine hand.* But I need not multiply instances of which the Scripture records are so full; now, as when He dwelt upon

earth, our gracious Saviour says to the anxious afflicted spirit, *Be not afraid, only believe;* and to His disciples entering on the conflict with sore temptation, *Let not your hearts be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in Me.*

Rest, therefore, ye afflicted servants of God, on the promises made by your heavenly Master. The night of trouble may be around you, enemies may be before you, difficulties may press you from without, temptation assail you from within; but this is no proof that God has forsaken you. Are you looking to Him, trusting in Him; are you ready, like Gideon, to go forth in His strength, to fight His battle against every besetting sin? Then fear not, for He is on your side; *heaviness endureth for a night, but joy cometh in the morning;* nay, more, the Lord giveth *songs in the night,* even before the darkness passeth away the tried one, like Gideon, may worship God and rejoice. The believer goes from strength to strength, even as day by day on the bough the fruit ripens and swells towards perfection. There is a growth in grace, an increase in love and in submission, which is visible even to the world.

The salvation of the righteous is of the Lord, He is their strength in the time of trouble. And the Lord shall help them and deliver them. He shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them because they trust in Him!

CHAPTER XVII.

DISCLOSURE.

"I AM certain," reflected Isa Gritton, as she retired to rest on that night, "that Lottie Stone bears a clear conscience, whatever her reason for silence may be. How her poor face, worn and anxious as it looked at first, brightened when she heard of the support which God gives to the faith of His people in time of need. I wish that I had had an opportunity of speaking to her after the service was ended, but when I rose from my knees and looked for her, she was gone. I trust her—yes, I will trust her. Is there not a certain degree of faith which Christians should extend one to another, as it is the property of charity that it *thinketh no evil?*"

Lottie and her strange conduct had been much on the mind of Isa, and when she came to breakfast on the following morning it was with the intention of proposing again to drive over to Axe for a second interview with her truant little maid. But thoughts of Lottie were driven away for the time by a subject of closer personal interest.

When Isa entered the breakfast-room a little later

than usual, she found Gaspar there already, pacing up and down the apartment with a letter in his hand, which had come by the early post. He looked restless, excited, and angry, and Isa saw that no light cause of annoyance disturbed him, before he broke forth with the angry question, "Is this your doing, Isa; have I to thank you for this?" and thrust into the hand of his sister the note which he had just received.

The epistle did not look at all formidable: it was brief, written on tinted paper, and in a lady's handwriting. It was no formal law document, yet had it been read with much the same emotions as a summons to the bar of justice might have been. With anxiety, mingled with interest, Miss Gritton read as follows:—

LONDON, *May* 1.

SIR,—I have just received information which has greatly surprised me, to the effect that the £4000 which I had been led to believe had been invested in property lost in the *Orissa* was actually invested in the cargo of the *St. Christopher*, which safely arrived at its destination, and, as I am given to understand, realized a profit of fifty per cent. I shall place the affair in the hands of my lawyer unless I receive a satisfactory explanation from yourself. As a personal interview is desirable, I shall go immediately to Axe, which is, I understand, in your neighbourhood, and either appoint an hour for meeting you at the hotel,

or, as I am acquainted with your sister, call on Miss Gritton and see you in her presence.—I have the honour to be, &c. CORA MADDEN.

"Gaspar, I had nothing to do with this; Cora has learned nothing from me," said Isa, as she returned the note to her brother.

He looked at her with a keen, suspicious gaze, but she met it with that frank, open glance which carries conviction of truthfulness even to the sceptical mind.

Gaspar pressed his hand to his brow, which was furrowed with deep lines of perplexity and care. "It must have been through the captain," he muttered to himself; "and yet I thought—but no matter, she's on the scent now, wherever she took it up. Isa, you must stand by me," nervously added Mr. Gritton; "you must help me through this difficulty."

"How can I help you?—I do not fully understand even the nature of the difficulty," said Isa. She paused to give her brother an opportunity for explanation, but he only had recourse to his snuff-box. Isa pressed him no further; she had a painful conviction, as she looked upon her unhappy brother, that he was unable to give any explanation which would satisfy her own sense of honour.

The state of the case may be briefly laid before

the reader. Gaspar had already invested largely himself in the cargo of the *Orissa*, when he had received directions in regard to the money of Miss Madden. Unwilling that her interests should clash with his own, the *Orissa* being the fastest sailer on the line, and the hope of large profits depending much on being first in the market, Gaspar had placed the property of his client in the *St. Christopher*, intending to apprise the lady that he had been unable to ship it in the vessel which had first started. While yet in the Channel, the *Orissa* had foundered in a storm, with Gaspar's investment in her hold. The loss of so much property had been a great shock to one whose soul was bent upon gain; Gaspar had been overwhelmed by the unexpected misfortune, when the Tempter had suggested to him a means by which the loss might actually be converted into profit. Few knowing anything of the circumstances of Cora's investment, still fewer having any interest in the subject, it might be possible by an exercise of craft, to make it appear that the lady's property had been in the *Orissa*, and that Gaspar's own had been embarked in the ship which had safely arrived.

Gaspar had at first shrunk from the wicked suggestion. Though he was not a very scrupulous man, there was yet a sufficient sense of honour left within his breast to make him aware of the enormity of the crime to which he was tempted. But *the love of*

money is the root of all evil, and with Gaspar it had become an absorbing passion; he was also proud of the possession of that miserable cunning which some deem cleverness, but which is foolishness indeed in the sight of a holy God. Conscience and a feeling of honour, these were the barriers which, for a short time, had resisted the pressure of strong temptation; for Gaspar *had* a conscience, though by covetousness long-indulged its power had been greatly weakened. But the barriers had given way, and Gaspar having once grasped unlawful gain, and added to his stores the gold which rightfully belonged to another, soon experienced the natural consequence of yielding to sin. His heart had become hardened, his nature debased, and he had fallen more and more completely under the dominion of the vice of covetousness which he had once suffered to subdue him. A hard and merciless task-master he had found it! While haunted with a perpetual dread of disgrace, and fear of losing his ill-gotten wealth, Gaspar could not enjoy it. He was poor in the midst of riches, miserable in the possession of that for which he had sold his conscience. Notwithstanding every precaution, Gaspar's secret had oozed out, and fears of exposure—ruin—shame—rose up before him like phantoms.

"She may be here this very day," were the first words from the miserable man which broke the oppressive silence. "Isa, you must not quit the

house—you must remain beside me—you know Miss Gritton, and may influence her mind."

"I influence Cora!" exclaimed Isa; "I know her, indeed—perhaps too well—but ours was never the intimacy of friendship!" The young lady spoke with some emotion, for every recollection connected with Cora was bitter. It is true that Isa no longer regarded her separation from Lionel as a misfortune. Since she had come so near to the place of his former sojourn, light had been thrown upon his character which had revealed something of its selfishness and hollowness, and upon the young maiden purer hopes were dawning than even those of first love; but still, of all beings upon earth Cora Madden was the one whom Isa regarded with most fear and aversion. She looked upon Cora as an impersonification of malice; as a dangerous woman; the bearer of the apple of discord; one who delighted to turn into ridicule all whose standard of duty was higher than her own. Isa had struggled to keep down the feelings of restraint which swelled in her heart, and, like Edith, never to speak of her enemy save to her God; she had tried to banish Cora even from her memory; but now it appeared that she might be brought into close contact with Miss Madden, and in a way most painful. Isa could not close her eyes to the fact that her brother stood in a humiliating position, and innocent as she herself was, she must yet share his humiliation. She must see

scorn—just scorn—on that haughty lip whose sneer had already stung her like a scorpion; she might have to ask indulgence from one to whom she could with difficulty accord forgiveness. All Isa's natural pride rose up in arms against this. Why should she endure the shame when innocent of the guilt? Let Gaspar abide the consequences of his own conduct, whatever that conduct might have been; she would leave him to make what explanation, arrange what compromise he could; she would go to the Castle, where no word of reproach, no glance of scorn would ever reach her, where she would be welcomed by relatives whose behaviour had never brought a blush to her cheek. This was Isa's thought for a moment, but it was instantly put aside as selfish, ungenerous, unkind. Her brother, at this time of all others had need of her sympathy, counsel, and support. She might help him to struggle not only against outward difficulties, but the inward enemies —the Midianites—that had brought him into this strait—that had struck at his honour, and destroyed his peace. Might not the disclosure which had covered him with shame be a means of loosening his fetters? The social worship of the preceding evening, the prayers which she had heard uttered by one whom, of all men, she most honoured, had braced the spirit of Isa. The whole history of Gideon was to her as a commentary on the text, *Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.*

She would, in her maiden meekness, stand at the post where God had placed her, stand against the spiritual foes of her soul; she would not sink under disappointment, yield to discontent, or harbour distrust of her Lord. She would ask for strength, and look for strength, and believe that strength would be given.

Isa's first struggle was against the feeling of contempt inspired by the conduct of Gaspar. If it were wrong to desert her brother, was it not also wrong to despise him; and yet how closely did her very pity seem to be allied with scorn! Now that for the first time Gaspar turned to her for sympathy, he must find it; not sympathy with his wretched grasping at gain, but with him in the pain and perplexity into which that grasping had brought him. Mr. Gritton was in a miserable state of indecision, and Isa was the sole confidant of his troubles; as she already knew so much, he almost unconsciously let her know all. Now he clung to the hope that what Cora suspected she would find it impossible to prove, that he might safely abide even the issue of a lawsuit; then all his thoughts were turned towards a compromise which might save his honour without too far trenching on his interests; much might be done in a personal interview; an inexperienced woman might easily be induced to compound for the restoration of part of her property, by yielding up her claim to the residue.

After long, restless pacing up and down the room, revolving various plans and expedients, Gaspar threw himself on a chair by his sister, and nervously opened to her his views, concluding by saying in an embarrassed tone, "You will explain—you will soften—you will induce Miss Madden to listen to reason."

"Gaspar, dear Gaspar, suffer me to speak freely and openly to you," said Isa, whose mind had been as actively engaged as that of her brother as she had sat silent by the casement, with her untouched work lying on her knee. "When we have gone out of the straight way, surely, surely our first care should be to retrace our steps; if any wrong has been done, should it not be set right without further delay?"

"I want your help, and not your advice," muttered Gaspar.

"Yet hear me," said Isa earnestly, for she felt that something more precious than her brother's interests, more dear than even his reputation was at stake; "I know that you have been unhappy—I have seen it; your better, your nobler nature has been oppressed by a burden which—which you may now throw off and for ever. Oh, deal frankly and fairly by Cora Madden! Give her what is her due, principal and interest, even to the utmost farthing; poverty is no evil, want itself is no evil, compared with the gnawing consciousness of possessing that which cannot have God's blessing upon it."

Gaspar pressed his thin bloodless lips together, as if suppressing a groan. He felt his sister's fervent appeal—it found an echo in his own conscience; but he was not yet prepared to throw down his idol, to burst from the yoke which galled. Mr. Gritton rose hastily, without replying, and resumed his restless walk. Isa could but guess the nature of the struggle going on within, and silently pray that God might strengthen the faith of the tempted one, and give victory to the right.

If not the most painful, that was certainly one of the most tedious days that had ever been passed by Isa Gritton. Gaspar was irritable, nervous, wretched; vacillating as a pendulum, never in the same mind for twenty minutes together. He appeared to be constantly on the watch; never left the house, stood often gazing forth from the window, and nervously started at every unusual sound. There seemed to Isa to be a spell on the hands of her watch, they moved so slowly; she could not pursue her accustomed occupations, for Gaspar was unwilling to have her out of his sight, and was perpetually interrupting her with snatches of conversation. But the long day closed at last—closed in mist and rain; a dull white fog blotted out the landscape, and ere the hour of sunset, twilight closed in. Isa tried to beguile the evening by reading aloud, but even the work on commercial statistics entirely failed to interest Gaspar. His mind was abstracted, his ear

painfully on the strain for other sounds than those of his sister's melodious voice. Glad was Isa when the hour at length arrived when she could retire, and prepare herself, by devotional reading, prayer, and then rest, for whatever the morrow might bring.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MERCY AND SELF-DENIAL.

THE Sabbath morning rose clear and bright, Nature looking all the fairer for the tears which she had shed on the previous night. As Isa Gritton was completing her toilette, Hannah brought in a note. Isa instantly recognized the handwriting; and as this missive had evidently not passed through the post, but been brought by a messenger, the young lady, with some anxiety, broke open the envelope and read its contents.

SATURDAY EVENING.

DEAR MISS GRITTON,—I was on the way to Axe, but felt so ill with feverish headache that I could not proceed beyond this wretched little inn (the Black Bear), which, as I hear, is not ten minutes' walk from your house. Could you come over and see me?—Yours, CORA MADDEN.

"Who brought this?" inquired Isa of Hannah.

"Mrs. Taylor, the landlady of the 'Black Bear.' She's a-waiting below, and she says that she wants to see you partic'lar."

Isa hastened downstairs, and found in the hall the landlady of the roadside public-house, which had been dignified with the name of an inn on the strength of the single guest-chamber which it held above the tap-room. Cora Madden must have felt ill indeed before she accepted such shelter. The landlady was a woman of a coarse and vulgar stamp, deeply pitted with small-pox, and with a strong scent of spirits about her. Isa felt repugnance at the idea of paying a visit at her house.

"The lady writ that last night," said Mrs. Taylor, not waiting to be questioned, but speaking loud and fast and without a pause; "but it warn't convenient to send it over, for Tom hadn't come in, and Jim hadn't just his legs; and 'twas lucky I didn't, 'cause we did not know what it was, and now it's all come out red as fire."

"What has come out? what do you mean?" asked Miss Gritton.

"The small-pox, miss; quite full out—not a place on her face where you could lay a sixpenny bit. It's very unlucky it's in my house, but the chay put up in the stables last night, and the man's a-going to put the horse to—"

"Stop!" exclaimed Isa; "let me understand you. Do you mean to tell me that Miss Madden is lying ill of small-pox in your house?"

"But won't stop there long—couldn't think of it. I've six children, and I nigh died of small-pox myself

these thirty years back, so I know what it be; and it's a great shame, it is, to come a-sickening in the midst of a family, and get an inn the name of being infected. But she's a-going at once back to Portal, or on to Axe, afore she's an hour older."

"A moment—listen!" cried Isa, interrupting with difficulty the loud incoherent rattle of the landlady; "are you going to send away a lady ill of the small-pox, without so much as knowing where she can find a place of shelter?"

"I guess there be lodgings to be had somewhere; if not at one place at another; they'll drive about till they find 'un; she can't stay with me, I've a large family, and thirty years back come Michaelmas I—"

Isa Gritton pressed her hand to her forehead, trying to collect her thoughts, distracted by the vociferous talking. A new difficulty had, most unexpectedly, risen before her; a sudden emergency, and—as something seemed to whisper within—a call for the exercise of Christian mercy towards one whom she had regarded as a foe.

The sound of Mrs. Taylor's loud voice drew Gaspar Gritton out of his room. "Who is here? is anything the matter?" he cried.

"It can't be expected that I should turn my house into an hospital, and frighten away customers and—" Mrs. Taylor would have pursued her remarks had she had any listener, but Isa, anxious and troubled

in countenance, had drawn her brother into the study.

"Gaspar, Cora is at the 'Black Bear,' ill with small-pox. The landlady is going to send her away at once to find a shelter where she may. Oh, were the complaint anything but small-pox, it would seem but common charity to offer her a refuge here!"

"And lay her under obligation; ay, ay, I see—lay her under deepest obligation—I see, I see; the best thing that could possibly be done!" cried Gaspar.

Isa was startled at her brother's eagerness; her words had been the intuitive expression of the feelings of a generous spirit, but she had not seriously contemplated bringing a small-pox patient into her home. Gaspar saw his sister's cheek turn pale, and became aware that the step proposed must be attended not only with great personal inconvenience, but serious hazard to his young and beautiful sister. Unlike her brother, Isa had never yet had the malady, and regarded it with considerable dread. It was not only the peril to life, and the minor risk of permanent disfigurement, which made Isa shrink from exposing herself to infection, but the quarantine to which she must be subjected while nursing a patient in small-pox would be, especially at this time, a very serious trial. It would be like a sudden calling back of winter when the blossoms of spring were opening to sweetest fragrance and brightest beauty. Even the dull comfortless days at Wildwaste had been gemmed with

some moments of such exquisite happiness, as had almost served to brighten the whole; and now must the door be closed against even Edith and Henry Eardley, because it had been opened to receive Cora Madden? Gaspar read strong repugnance to the sacrifice in the expressive countenance of his sister.

"No, no," he said; "you might take the infection. Miss Madden must try her chance somewhere else."

"Let me consider for a few moments, Gaspar. Detain the woman, I must ask counsel ere I decide," and Isa hurriedly sought her own room, to sink on her knees and implore guidance and light on the tangled path opening before her.

There were a few words which Isa had heard from the lips of the vicar at Axe, which she had laid up in her heart for a time of perplexity like this:—"When you are in doubt as to what course to pursue, when reason appears to be lost in a mist, and you cannot clearly discern the narrow path of duty, ask conscience two simple questions,—'Were my Lord in visible presence here, what would He bid me do? what may I venture to believe that He would have done in my place?' Such questions, honestly put, and in a spirit of prayer, will draw forth such a reply as will clear off the mist, and be as the voice saying, *This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand or to the left.*"

Isa obeyed the direction now; bending her head over her clasped hands, with the prayer, "Oh, guide

me, Lord, by Thy counsel!" she asked conscience the two simple questions. Familiar words of Scripture recurred to her mind,—*Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye also so unto them.* What would she desire if, like Cora, she were ill, desolate, and alone, driven from the shelter even of a miserable wayside inn, and sent to seek from house to house a place in which to lay—perchance a dying head? And what would have been the conduct of the Merciful One towards such a sufferer, however erring, however guilty? Would He have paused to consider whether she were a foe or a friend? *Christ pleased not Himself*, and He *hath left an example that we should follow his steps.*

Isa rose from her knees, and calling the servant, whom she heard spreading the breakfast in the adjoining apartment, she at once gave order for preparing for the reception of a lady ill of small-pox. Isa would give up her own sleeping-room to Cora, and have Lottie's little pallet-bed placed in the boudoir for herself. Leaving Hannah wondering and grumbling, Isa returned to her brother and informed him of her decision. Gaspar, glad that it was such as might further his own selfish interests, sent off Mrs. Taylor to make arrangements for Cora's removal to Wildwaste Lodge.

Isa had won another silent victory over the Midianites within, over Selfishness, Vanity, and Fear. One sacrifice had given her strength for another.

Under the influence of that faith which worketh by love, Isa made every preparation for the comfort of Cora that she could have made for that of a cherished sister, giving her own personal efforts to make up for the shortness of time and the incapacity or unwillingness of her servant. Not more than half an hour elapsed before a chaise drove up to the door, where Isa Gritton stood ready to welcome Cora Madden. The driver feared to help out the invalid, who—swathed in blankets, a miserable, disfigured object—would have been forced to descend without aid, and drag her tottering limbs into the house, had not Isa's hands been stretched out to support—had not Isa's slight arm been thrown gently around her. Cora crossed the threshold, and feebly walked up the staircase, resting upon the woman whose peace she for a time had blighted, whose prospects she had done her utmost to destroy! Self-denying kindness may be shown to a friend from natural affection—to a stranger from intuitive pity; but when shown to a bitter enemy, it is one of the strongest proofs that the love of Christ which constraineth hath been shed abroad in the heart.

"You are indeed a good Samaritan; God will bless you for it!" murmured Cora, as she sank upon her comfortable bed, while Isa gently beat up the pillow to support the aching head of her guest. Never had a blessing from any other lips gone so warm to the heart of Isa; it was a blessing wrung,

as it were, from an enemy; it was as the encouraging word heard by Gideon on the night when he stood in the camp of the foe.

Gaspar had sent from the hamlet a messenger for a doctor. He came before noon, and pronounced that Miss Madden had not been injured by her removal, and that with care she was likely to do well. He prescribed absolute quietness, and forbade her speaking much on any subject, especially such as might excite her. But it was easier for the doctor to give the order than it was for Isa to enforce it. Her patient little merited the name. Cora was eager to speak on business; and Isa could scarcely soothe her into silence by entreating that she would wait a few days, and that then she might have an interview with Mr. Gritton himself.

Gaspar had made the unusual effort of walking over to the steward's cottage, to speak to Mr. Holdich about a nurse to assist his sister. Rebekah at once volunteered to go herself, if her husband's consent were obtained, and to Isa's great relief appeared at the Lodge just as the doctor quitted it. Not only were her experience and willing help a great comfort to the young lady, but the presence of a gentle, pious woman, sympathizing and kind, was a real pleasure to Isa. Much cheerful converse they had together in the boudoir, with the door open between it and the room in which Cora lay sleeping. Rebekah had many a pleasant anecdote to relate to an attentive

hearer, of Edith and of one dearer than Edith. Never had Isa listened to tale of romance with half the interest with which she did now to the account of the difficulties which had to be overcome, and the efforts to be made by the vicar of Axe, to introduce a knowledge of vital religion into that remote and benighted part of his parish which surrounded Castle Lestrange.

The tidings of Cora's illness and its nature was not long in reaching the little country town of Axe. Mrs. Green stood at the door of her shop on the Monday morning, exchanging gossip with her neighbour the baker.

"If ever there was a parson like ours," she observed. "Always at work, Sundays and week-days; and as anxious about his folk as if they were all his children. He was here again, not an hour ago, to look after that little thief upstairs; but I chanced to say to him, 'I s'pose you've heard, sir, as Miss Madden's lying sick of small-pox at Wildwaste Lodge?' and he looked as if he'd heard sudden of the death of his father, and repeated, 'Small-pox—Wildwaste Lodge!' as if the words was a knell."

"I daresay Mr. Eardley's sorry for the poor lady; she was his parishioner some years ago when the Maddens lived at the Castle."

"He must have taken an uncommon interest in her," said Mrs. Green with a smile, "for he forgot all about what he'd come for, and was off for the

Lodge like a shot. He's not one to be afeard of infection; he sat up all night with poor Bramley, when he was a-dying of the fever. Maybe he thinks that if Miss Madden's in a bad way, she might like to have a word with a parson."

"She was one of the worldly and gay," observed the baker, shaking his head. "I don't believe that she and Mr. Eardley had ever much to say to one another; but she's the sister of his friend Mr. Arthur, and the vicar may care for her for his sake."

Had the duty of spiritual visitation been all that had led Henry Eardley to bend his rapid steps towards Wildwaste, he must have returned to Axe disappointed. Cora had passed a favourable night, and suffered little but from the extreme irritation caused by her malady. When Isa softly glided to her side, and whispered that the clergyman had called to inquire for her, and to know whether she had any wish to see him, Cora replied with a characteristic sneer, "I'm not dying; and if I were, I would send for the undertaker as soon as the parson!"

And yet it was with no feeling of disappointment that Henry Eardley went on his homeward way. He turned from the dull, unsightly brick building on the common as one loth to leave the earthly paradise in which has been passed a golden hour of life. His interview with Isa had indeed been but brief, but it was one which left memories behind

which would remain fragrant in his soul to the close of his mortal existence.

"Priceless jewel enclosed in yon dull casket!" said Henry Eardley to himself, turning to give a parting glance at Isa's home. "May Heaven watch over that precious one's life, and shield her from the danger to which her noble, unselfish devotion has exposed her!"

That prayer welled up from the depths of the vicar's soul. It was for one of whom he for the first time dared to let himself think as possibly the future partner of all his joys and his sorrows, his guardian angel, his treasure. Henry Eardley had been fascinated by Isa when meeting her at the Castle; but a painful misgiving had rested on his mind as to whether she, the bright ornament of society, flattered and admired, were suited for, or could ever endure the life of lowly active usefulness which that of a vicar's wife should be. From the time when he had first given himself to the ministry, Mr. Eardley had made a firm resolve, that should he ever ask a woman in marriage, she should be one who would be his helper, and not his hinderer, in doing his Master's work. A pastor and his wife should be as the two hands of a watch—the one moving in a larger circle and with more visible activity than the other, but both fixed on the same centre, both moved by the same spring, united in the same work, and pointing to the same truth. With this conviction on his mind,

Henry Eardley had almost resolved to shun the society of the baronet's niece as a dangerous pleasure; such a bird of paradise, he thought, would never brook the lowly perch, the secluded nest. But when he saw Isa pale from watching by the sickbed of a comparative stranger, for whom the beauteous had risked the loss of beauty, and the youthful that of life, all such misgivings passed for ever away. Henry Eardley felt that if he dare but aspire to the hand of Isa Gritton, even were the malady which she had braved to rob her of all her loveliness, he would be of all men on earth the most blest. That which the maiden had feared would divide her from him whose regard she most valued, was but as a golden link to bind them together for ever.

CHAPTER XIX.

REFRESHMENT.

"BETTER go back, Lottie; ye were dead tired last time," said Steady to his sister on the evening of the next lecture, as she sat down by the road-side to rest, on her way to the steward's cottage.

"I was not half so tired as my heart felt afore I went to the meeting," replied Lottie. "Thought I, if I don't get some help with this burden of trouble, I'll just lie down and die. All the people looking so strangely at me, and speaking so cruelly of me—no news from mother—no news of poor father—and now my dear young mistress nursing a lady in the small-pox, and I away! Oh! if she catches it," Lottie started up as if the idea had inspired her with fresh energy, "I will go and nurse her; nothing shall stay me; she shall see that I ain't ungrateful."

"Maybe she won't catch it," observed Steady.

"I pray God with all my heart and soul that she may not!" cried Lottie. "I should like," she continued, more quietly, as she plodded along the dusty high road with her brother, "I should like to have

nursed Miss Madden, not 'cause I care for her, but for the sake of her brother, Mr. Arthur."

"He was the best friend as ever we had," observed Steady.

"He taught us about heaven—he helped us in trouble—he worked so hard to put out the fire when the flames were a'most catching our cottage. And to think of his lying dying far, far away in Jerusalem!" The black eyes of Lottie Stone were brimming over with tears.

"Mind—you'll be run over!" exclaimed Steady, suddenly pulling his sister to one side, out of the way of an open carriage which was coming up rapidly behind them. The Stones had been walking in the centre of the road.

Full as she was of her own mournful thoughts, Lottie did not even look at the carriage as it whirled past; but she was startled by a voice from it, suddenly exclaiming, "Stop, coachman, stop! Yes; that is Lottie Stone, with her brother!"

Lottie uttered a low cry of delight as she glanced up and recognized the face, emaciated, indeed, and very pale, of the benefactor of her family, as he bent smiling from the carriage to greet those whom he had not seen for years. Arthur Madden and his sister Lina had a few hours before arrived at Axe, having hastened thither immediately upon reaching England, from hearing tidings of the illness of Cora. They had been relieved from anxiety on her account

by Mr. Eardley, from whom they learned that the invalid was in a fair way to recover. Medical men had strictly forbidden Arthur to expose himself in his weakened state to any hazard of infection; and Lina, his devoted nurse, was thankful not to be obliged to leave him, as the clergyman informed her how tenderly Cora was watched over by Isa Gritton.

Arthur and Lina had taken up their quarters at a quiet hotel at Axe. A message from the former to the vicar had brought Mr. Eardley instantly to see them. With hearty joy and fervent thanksgiving, Henry wrung the thin hand of his friend.

"The accounts of you had been so alarming that that I had hardly ventured to hope to see your face again in this world!" cried the vicar.

"The voyage did me much good, and the sight of dear familiar faces will do me much more," said Arthur. "I long to be again amongst my old pupils at Wildwaste, and to meet with honest Holdich once more. Do you still hold your little week-day services in that honey-suckle mantled cottage, which is connected in my mind with some of its pleasant recollections?"

"I hold one there this evening," replied Mr. Eardley.

"Then we will go to it," cried Arthur Madden; "it will so remind us of *Auld lang syne*. Nay, no remonstrance, Lina," he added gayly, as he read an

objection in the face of his anxious young nurse; "it will *not* tire me, it will *not* give me a chill; it will make me feel ten years younger to find myself amongst my poor friends again; and I should like our first meeting to be in that place, where we used to worship together. I will ring and order an open carriage to be here early enough to give us half-an-hour for greetings before the service begins; at least, if it be not inconvenient for you to start so soon," said Arthur, addressing himself to the vicar, "for you must come with us in the carriage, and tell us on the way the thousand things which I wish to hear of Wildwaste and its people."

There is nothing so healthful as happiness. The keen enjoyment which Arthur felt in returning to the place where he had first laboured for God, where he had first realized what a blessed thing it is to win souls for Christ, was as a powerful tonic to his enfeebled constitution. Never had his eye looked brighter, or his voice sounded more cheerful, than during that drive from Axe, as he recognized familiar landmarks, and questioned his friend, Mr. Eardley, as to the fortunes of those whom he had known before quitting England.

"I remember that Wildwaste is not in your parish. Has it the same aged minister still?"

"Yes; but I hear that Mr. Bull is about to resign his cure. He is now unable to perform even the shortest service."

"I hope and trust that an earnest, hard-working man may be put in his place," said Arthur.

"God grant it!" was the vicar's response.

"And old Tychicus Bolder, the teetotaller," inquired young Madden after a pause; "does he still declaim as fiercely as ever against the evils of Wildwaste?"

"The rod of affliction has been heavy on poor Bolder. He suffered so greatly from rheumatism last winter that it was feared that he might altogether lose the use of his limbs; but he has rallied wonderfully during the last few days, and he expressed a hope, when I last saw him, that he would be able to get to church again in the summer."

"He seemed to me," observed Lina Madden, "one of the most proud, uncharitable, and self-righteous men that I ever had met with; but I suppose that we shall see him much changed."

"He is much changed indeed," replied Mr. Eardley, "for to poor Bolder suffering has not been sent in vain. He used to look around him for subjects of censure, now he has learned to look within; and what he did before to be honoured of men, he does now for the sake of his God. Human nature regards sickness and pain as enemies, but it is through such enemies that a message of love and mercy has come to Bolder."

"And little Lottie Stone, my first acquaintance in Wildwaste, how fares she?" asked Arthur Mad-

den. "Methinks I see her now, in my mind's eye, the gipsy-like child, with her earnest black eyes, wrapped up in the old scarlet cloak, and—why, surely, there is Lottie herself!" he exclaimed, and calling to the coachman to stop, Arthur Madden, as we have already seen, greeted the young Stones with pleasure, which was more than reciprocated by them.

With the young hope is buoyant, and the sense of happiness keen. The sight of her benefactor living, convalescent, looking bright and kind as ever, seemed to Lottie's warm young heart an earnest that, like her late anxiety upon his account, all her other troubles would soon pass away. Her mother would come back—her father would live to be a blessing and comfort in his home—her own character would be fully cleared—Miss Gritton and her dear pastor would smile upon her again—and Heaven would guard her sweet lady from taking the infection of the fever! Mr. Eardley looked on that beaming young face, and his reflection was much the same as that of Isa had been, "There is no sense of guilt weighing on the conscience of that child; truth and innocence are written upon every feature."

"If you, too, are going to the lecture, Lottie, we'll spare you the long walk," said the smiling Lina.

"Yes, up with you, Lottie, beside the coachman," cried Arthur. "Steady will follow; I'll be bound he'll be in time. I never knew him late at my class; he was one on whom I could always depend."

The few words of kindly praise called up a grin of pleasure on the sun-burnt face of the dull-witted but true-hearted lad, who went plodding on his lonely way almost as happy as his sister.

The rapid motion of the vehicle on which she was mounted was very exhilarating to Lottie. She felt herself metaphorically, as well as literally, lifted on high from the dust, relieved from oppressive weariness, given rest and enjoyment, while at the same time borne swiftly onwards. When the carriage stopt at the honey-suckle covered porch, Lottie sprang down from her lofty seat light as a squirrel. She had no fear now of encountering cold looks, suspicious glances, as groups from the neighbourhood dropt into the meeting. Every eye was fixed upon Arthur Madden; no one seemed to have a thought but for him and his sister, so lately arrived from the Holy Land. Lottie missed, indeed, amongst the throng her young mistress and Rebekah Holdich, who were both absent from fear of conveying infection; but her prayers for them both rose now with a feeling of joyous confidence, to which the poor girl had been a stranger since making that promise of silence to Gaspar, which had been the source of such pain and distress.

CHAPTER XX.

LECTURE VI.

FAITH VICTORIOUS.

WE are to contemplate this evening, my friends, in one of the most marvellous triumphs ever granted to faith, a most striking emblem of the victory of the gospel over the opposition of earth and hell. We will first consider the historical narrative before us; then see how in it is prefigured the success attending the preaching of the apostles and disciples of our Lord; and, finally, draw encouragement for ourselves in our conflict against the Midianites in our own souls.

Gideon, after returning to his camp, made immediate preparations for a night attack upon the foe. But these preparations were of a nature to cause surprise amongst his three hundred devoted men. They were not to string the bow or to grasp the keen sword; they were to go forth into the midst of the armed multitudes of Midian as sheep amongst wolves, without—as it seems—either weapons of offence or armour for protection! Gideon divided his little band into three companies, and he put a trumpet

into every man's hand, with an empty pitcher, and a lamp was placed within each pitcher. And the leader said to his followers: "Look on me, and do likewise: and, behold, when I come to the outside of the camp, it shall be that, as I do, so shall ye do. When I blow with a trumpet, I and all that are with me, then blow ye the trumpets also on every side of all the camp, and say, *The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!*"

So Gideon, and the hundred men that were with him, came unto the outside of the camp in the beginning of the middle night watch, and they blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers that were in their hands.

Loud and terrible was the sound that thus startled the hosts of Midian from their slumbers on that eventful night—the blare of the trumpets, the crash of the vessels, while suddenly the glare of a hundred waving torches lit up the darkness! From this side and that side the sound is echoed, the flash is reflected, while loud bursts the shout that strikes terror into the Midianites' souls,—"*The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!*" Smitten with panic, confused by the noise, dazzled by the glare, the multitudes of Midian are but embarrassed by their own numbers, they cannot distinguish friend from foe,—they snatch up their weapons, indeed, and use them with frantic vigour, but every man's hand is turned against his own fellow—warriors strike right and

left, but their fierce blows fall on their own companions in arms! One wild instinct to save life by flight possesses all that vast host; men rush hither and thither with frantic speed, careless of trampling over the corpses of countrymen, comrades, brothers!

The chosen three hundred, the "forlorn hope" of Israel, had thus, through the power of Israel's God, discomfited and put to flight the armies of the aliens; but their brethren were to join in the pursuit. Warriors gathered out of Naphtali, Asher, and Manasseh, and pressed hard on the flying foe. Gideon despatched messengers throughout all Ephraim, calling on the men of that neighbouring tribe to seize on the fords of Jordan, to intercept the flight of the Midianites over the river. His directions were obeyed; the warlike Ephraimites joined in the effort to free their country from the foe; they pursued Midian, and brought the heads of two of its princes, Oreb and Zeeb, to Gideon on the other side of the Jordan.

In the marvellous success granted to the efforts of a handful of men who, strong in faith, though armed only with trumpets to sound, and torches to display, we see most clearly foreshadowed the triumph of the gospel in the days of the apostles and their immediate followers. The whole world lay in wickedness, shrouded in deep moral darkness, like the hosts of Midian in night, when the Saviour came down unto His own, to be despised and rejected of men. Satan appeared to hold the human race under a yoke which

no effort could break. Rome, that towered supreme amongst the nations, that held in subjection even the chosen land of Israel, was wholly given to idolatry. Incense offered to false gods rose from unnumbered shrines, benighted myriads worshipped vain idols in blind superstition. And what was the force chosen by God to oppose—to discomfit the powers of earth and of hell, to overthrow heathen altars, to raise the banner of the cross against Satan and his hosts, against the kings and princes of this world? A little band of apostles and disciples—a few fishermen and their companions—mostly poor, mostly unlearned, were to engage in this the most mighty struggle which the world had ever known! Not as the followers of Mohammed, with the sword to sweep their enemies from the earth; the early Christians had, as it were, like Gideon's men, their *torches* and their *trumpets*. The trumpet, symbol of preaching, —the loud clear declaration of the glorious truth that salvation is offered freely to men through the blood of an incarnate God. *If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?* saith the Apostle Paul, who himself gave a blast, the echo of which still resoundeth throughout the world! And the torches which these early Christians displayed were the examples of their pure and devoted lives—shining through—dispelling the darkness around them, according to the word of their Lord, *Let your light so shine before men, that they*

may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

But the treasure was borne in earthly vessels, and those vessels were broken and shattered, that the light might more clearly be seen. "The blood of martyrs was the seed of the Church." All the apostles, with the single exception of St. John, who was persecuted and banished, died a violent death for the sake of the gospel. But their lights did not perish with them: no; they were lifted on high to shine in glory, enlightening generation after generation, with a brilliance which shall never pass away. Thus was it that our religion triumphed over the enemy by the flash of the torch and the blast of the trumpet. The victory of Gideon was as a rehearsal of the infinitely more glorious triumph of the gospel of Christ.

And now, dear brethren, to apply to our consciences the lesson before us, let us examine into the work of faith and the power of faith in our own souls. What do we know of conflict, what do we know of victory over the Midianites in our hearts, even our own besetting sins? Have we left those sins quietly in possession to degrade and enslave our souls, or have we sought to fight the good fight? If we have attempted to throw off the enemy's yoke, how have we prepared ourselves for the battle? Our own good resolutions, our trust in our own strength, our pride of conscious virtue, these may

have been as the forces that gathered at first around Gideon, but not to those are the victory given. The triumph must be that, not of human strength, but of God-bestowed *faith.* It was when St. Paul, struggling with inward corruption, exclaimed, *O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death!* that he was enabled to add, *Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!*

Again, the weapons with which we assault the enemy in his camp may find their emblems in the torches and trumpets carried by Gideon's band. There is the loud alarm of conscience, sounding clear and distinct in the soul, giving no uncertain sound. There are the precepts and promises of Scripture, scattering the darkness around—*Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path;* while often painful dispensations, the shattering of human joys, the crash of the earthen vessels, make that Word to shine to us with a brilliance unknown in the days of our joy. But instead of the shout of Gideon, the Christian's voice is raised in prayer. It is the cry to the Lord for help that puts the Destroyer to flight. Thus may we discomfit our spiritual foes, *more than conquerors* through Him who loved us,—

> "His grace our strength, our guide His word;
> Our aim, the glory of the Lord!"

How was it with the patriarch Abraham when his faith had to endure one of the severest conflicts

recorded in Scripture, when he was commanded to offer up the son whom he loved? Dark was the night around him, his natural affections were enlisted on the enemy's side; but conscience sounded the call to obedience, while faith firmly grasped the promise, *In Isaac shall thy seed be called:* so dashing down, as the earthen vessels were dashed, any doubts or misgivings that would have obscured the light of that promise, Abraham triumphed because he believed, and received the reward of his faith.

In such an instance as this, to return to the simile of the tree, we see the ripe fruits of faith. The sun of God's grace has shone so brightly, the dew of His Spirit has rested so fully upon it, that we behold it at length in all its sweetness, richness, and beauty. Christian brethren, be content with nothing short of this. We see too many with whom it appears as if their graces never would ripen. There is a crudeness, a hardness about their religion which, if it do not make us doubt its nature, at least takes from it all its charm. Faith cannot be fully developed where the softness of humility, the sweetness of charity, are unknown. It is of the man who not only yields obedience to the commandments, but delights in the law of the Lord, that it is written, *He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth it shall prosper.*

CHAPTER XXI.

BONDAGE.

"LOOK at them out of the window! no, indeed! If they are so anxious to see their sister after a four years' separation, let them come to her in her chamber of sickness," was Cora's reply to an affectionate message from the newly-arrived travellers conveyed to her through Isa. "Since strangers are not afraid of infection," she continued with a sneer, "it shows that the danger may be braved even by those who have not, like Arthur Madden, a reputation for heroic self-devotion."

"Still the bitterness—still the satire: can trial and sickness teach her nothing?" thought Isa, as she left the room to send, in softened form, the ungracious message of Cora to her brother and sister, who were waiting in front of the house which they were forbidden to enter. Isa had already explained to Cora how great would be to Arthur the useless risk of a meeting, she had therefore felt it unnecessary to reply to a sarcasm which was at once so ungenerous and unjust.

Cora, against the remonstrances of her gentle

nurses, had insisted on rising and dressing. She was impatient of all restraint, and opposition only made her irritable. The first moment that she found herself alone, she walked up to the toilette-table and looked into the glass. For several minutes Cora remained motionless, mutely staring into the too faithful mirror, as if the frightful image which it contained had the transfixing power of the Gorgon; then she slowly turned from it, with her soul overflowing with bitterness. Miss Madden had possessed a certain share of good looks, which her vanity had magnified into beauty; now all had passed for ever away. Time, indeed, would remove much of the disfigurement which made a once handsome countenance hideous, but Cora knew too well that in her case time would never entirely efface the marks left by the small-pox. Perhaps no woman in Cora's position would have been insensible to a trial such as this, but to one who had sought all her happiness from the world, to whom its smile had been sunshine, the trial was well nigh intolerable. The loss of her personal attractions was to Cora a greater affliction than that of her property had been. Therefore was it that the heart of Cora was as a well of bitterness, full to the brim and overflowing in rebellion against God, and malice against her happier fellow-creatures.

And was there no gratitude towards the generous girl who had not only drawn, as it were, a sponge over the record of injuries past, but at the cost of a

painful sacrifice had acted the part of a sister towards her? Did no feeling of tenderness arise in the bosom of Cora when she looked on the bright lovely face which might so soon, for her sake, be marred like her own? It might have been so, even with Cora Madden, had she not chosen to regard the conduct of Isa, as well as that of Gaspar, as the result of interested calculation. "They knew well enough," she muttered to herself, "that once under their roof they had me at an advantage. Isa lavishes attentions on me as men pour water on gunpowder, when they fear to be shattered by its explosion. It was folly in me to consent to receive such hypocritical kindness; I wish that I had driven at once to Axe. But I have the wit to penetrate their designs, and the spirit to defeat them."

With this impression on her mind, Cora, on Isa's re-entering her apartment, at once addressed her in a tone of formal politeness,—

"I shall also have to trouble you, Miss Gritton, with a message to your brother. As soon as I have sufficient strength to go downstairs, I shall request an interview with Mr. Gritton, that we may come to an understanding on the unpleasant subject which I mentioned to him in my note. Doubtless," continued Cora with a sarcastic smile, "he will be glad of an opportunity of showing me with what a tender regard for my interests he, as my agent, always has acted."

Isa could make no reply; she did not trust herself even to look at the countenance of Cora, but at once quitted the room to convey the message to her brother. Scarcely had the door closed behind her when the attention of Cora was attracted by the sound of loud cheers rising from the direction of the little school which had been built by Arthur in Wildwaste, the manly voices of workmen blending with the shriller huzzas of the young.

"What can the idle villagers be shouting for?" said Cora to herself as she approached the window, and, concealing herself behind the muslin curtain, looked down on the scene below. She saw the whole population of Wildwaste—men, women, and children—gathered around an open carriage to welcome back the benefactor of all. Even old Bolder, forgetful of his infirmities, had dragged himself into the sunshine, to greet with hearty joy the friend of the poor. Cora caught a glimpse of the face of her brother, beaming with pure happiness, as he bent forward to recognize familiar faces in the crowd. Cora turned away with an expression of scorn on her lip, but a pang of envy at her heart. To whom would her presence bring joy? from whom could she look for welcome, either in this world or in the next? She had dwelt, like her brother, near Wildwaste; she had enjoyed the same opportunities as Arthur of instructing the ignorant and feeding the hungry. He had helped the poor—she had despised them; he had

found his happiness in doing his Master's will—she had sought hers in following her own. *Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart;* but on all that Cora had most prized was the mournful sentence inscribed, *Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.* Malice, worldliness, and pride now tormented the soul of Cora; these spiritual foes had come to her first as the Midianites to Israel in the time of Moses, not to alarm but to seduce. She had welcomed and harboured the tempters till they remained as masters and tyrants within: she now felt their yoke to be galling indeed.

The spirit of Gaspar Gritton was also acutely sensible at this time of the degradation of its bondage. The idea of the approaching interview with Miss Madden oppressed him with a humiliating feeling of fear. Nor was Gaspar free from care on the account of his sister. Isa's gentleness and unselfishness had had their natural effect in thawing that cold ungenial heart, and an undefined terror arose in it that he might, by pursuing his own interests, have sacrificed the life of the only being on earth whom he loved.

"Isa, you do not feel ill?" said Gaspar that evening to his sister, whom he had been for some time watching in anxious silence. Isa was sitting in the study, apparently engaged in reading, but it was long since she had turned the page; her head was leaning on her hand, a vivid colour was on her

cheek, but her appearance denoted languor and weariness, and, when Gaspar spoke, her large soft eyes had heavily closed, as if for slumber.

"No, not exactly ill," replied Isa, with a languid smile; "I have but a little headache, and feel as if I wanted rest."

"God grant that you have not taken the infection!"

"I was just thinking that if I should take it—and it is very possible that I may do so—it would be well for me to speak a few words to you before we are separated by illness or—or that in which illness might end." Isa had been silently praying for courage to make one effort more—it might be the last—to persuade her unhappy brother to act a just and honourable part. "I have told you our father's last commands, oh, let me join to them a sister's entreaties. Gaspar, act towards Cora Madden as you will wish that you had acted when you both stand before the judgment-seat of God." Isa spoke with emotion, and the feverish flush on her cheek grew brighter than before.

"What would you have me do?" asked Gaspar, in a low, agitated voice.

"What conscience bids, what God's word directs," replied Isa; "make restitution."

Gaspar rose and strode once or twice up and down the apartment with his hands behind him; his brow furrowed with an anxious frown. Presently he

stopped short before his sister, whose soul was rising in silent supplication for her tempted brother.

"Isa, you ask too much. To refund that money would be to acknowledge that it never ought to have been mine."

"But how will you then dare to meet face to face with one whom, I fear, you have wronged?"

"I'll not meet Cora Madden—I'll leave this place —I'll go abroad!" said Gaspar hurriedly, giving voice to a thought which had often recurred to his mind.

"And leave me?" cried Isa, reproachfully.

"You will be with relations who care for you; you will be in the Castle, or—" Gaspar stopped short, for a terrible thought flashed across him as he looked at the drooping form of his sister, that she might find a yet safer resting-place from sorrow and disgrace in the grave.

Startled by the idea, as by a spectre, Gaspar insisted on Isa's at once retiring to seek the rest which she needed. She lingered from the feeling that she might not be able to rise in the morning; that the languor and pain which she felt might be signs that the fatal fever was already in her veins. Isa could not leave Gaspar without one more appeal to the tempted one, whom — a secret foreboding voice seemed to whisper—she was now for the last time addressing. Isa returned back from the door to the spot where her brother was seated, softly laid her

hand on his shoulder, pressed her feverish lips on his brow, and then murmured, "Oh, Gaspar, fly not from duty! Whither can we go without having God and our conscience still beside us?" After uttering this last warning, she hastily quitted the room.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE NIGHT.

"OH, my Lord, do Thou direct and bless us: I cast all my cares upon Thee!" it was with this prayer in her heart that Isa laid her aching head on her pillow on that night. Cares had thickened around her; the danger of disease, disfigurement, perhaps an early death, was looming before her, yet Isa was not unhappy. Though scarcely able to frame a connected prayer, never had the maiden approached the mercy-seat with more childlike confidence than she did now. As the Christian goes from strength to strength, Isa's late victory over malice, resentment, and self-will, had left a sweet sense of repose in the love and the wisdom of God. Isa had risked her happiness for the sake of conscience; or rather she had placed her happiness in the hands of her Lord, where she felt it to be safer than in her own. He would guard her from sickness, suffering, and sorrow, or bless her in the midst of them all. God had given her—of this Isa now felt a sweet assurance—the heart of one whose affection to her outweighed the world; even

if it were God's will that she should not again on earth meet her Henry, the union of those who are one in Christ is not for this life alone. Isa, and him whom she loved, had alike given themselves unreservedly to their Lord; in life or in death they were His; and no really good thing would their heavenly Father withhold from His children. Isa's faith had greatly ripened during the last few days; she felt the sunshine on her soul, she felt the refreshing dew of God's grace, and a mellowed sweetness was the result; while peace mantled her soul like the soft down on the peach, from whose surface the drops from the bursting thunder-cloud trickle harmless away.

Very different was it with the unhappy Gaspar; little rest was to be his during that night. He was in an agony of irresolution; Isa's words had not been without their effect. Sometimes he resolved to meet Cora with an open confession, and throw himself on her generosity to shield his character from reproach, while he made all the reparation in his power for the injury which he had done her. Then, stronger than ever, came the impulse to fly the country. He had enough of property on the premises to enable him to live in comfort in some part of Europe where his antecedents would be unknown. If he could not keep his plunder in England from the grasp of the law, he would bear it thence, beyond reach of loss or of shame. But would he be beyond the avenging

arm of divine Justice? Might not that arm be raised at that very moment to smite him in the person of his sister; to make her—the pure, the innocent, the generous—a victim for the crime of her brother? The sound of footsteps in the sick-room above him made Gaspar restless and uneasy. Prognostications of evil disturbed him. When he fell at length into a state of slumber, through his dreams sounded the measured toll of the death-bell; a funeral seemed moving slowly before him, the black plumes of the hearse nodding over the white-bordered pall. Gaspar awoke with a start of terror, raised himself on his elbow, and gazed around him. To his disordered fancy, it seemed as if the light, which was always kept in his chamber at night, were burning blue; the shadows which it cast on ceiling and wall took strange shapes, which appalled him, he knew not why. The dimly-seen portrait of his father above the mantelpiece seemed to Gaspar to look on him with stern and threatening eyes; as he gazed he could fancy that they moved, and, wild as he knew the fancy to be, the idea made him strangely shiver.

Hark! was there not a moving of bolts and bars in the study adjoining, and a stealthy footstep heard on the creaking floor? Had Gaspar's secret been betrayed? Attracted by rich hoards of plunder, were robbers entering the house? Mr. Gritton strained his ear and listened, till at length, unable longer to endure uncertainty, he started up from his

couch and opened the door which divided his sleeping-room from the study. All there was perfectly dark, perfectly still; if there had been any sound it must have been but caused by the night wind shaking the shutters, or moaning under the door. Gaspar could not, however, return to his bed; he dressed, and, as he did so, marvelled to find his fingers trembling as if from palsied age.

Taking his candle to light him, Gaspar then proceeded to the vault which contained his treasure. He had perhaps no very definite purpose in visiting it, except that of removing a small sum required for household expenses; yet there was a floating idea in his mind of ascertaining how large a sum in gold he could convey away packed in so small a space as not to excite suspicion.

Lottie's accidental discovery of the vault had made her master more than usually on his guard against betraying his secret to others. He therefore carefully closed the trap-door behind him before descending the ladder, and as carefully closed the door which divided the outer vault from the inner, when he had entered the latter, the treasure-cave of his wealth.

There stood the miser in the midst of his hoards of silver and gold, a lonely miserable man. Those bags heavy with coin, won at the price of conscience and honour, had no more power to give peace to his soul than their hard cold contents could afford nour-

ishment to his frame. The place felt damp, the air oppressive, a deathly chill came over Gaspar Gritton. He had strange difficulty in unfastening the string round one of his canvas bags; his fingers shook violently as he did so, he overthrew the heavy bag, and had a dull perception that money was clinking and falling and rolling around him in every direction. Gaspar stooped with a vague intention of picking it up, but was utterly unable to find or even to see the coin, and equally impossible was it for him to regain his former standing posture. A strange numbness came over the unhappy man, thought and feeling were alike suspended, and he lay for hours in a senseless state on the damp brick-paved floor, besprinkled with gold.

Some degree of consciousness returned at last, but it was that strange consciousness which may exist in a trance of catalepsy, such as that which now enchained the faculties of Gaspar Gritton. He lay as one dead, in the position in which he had fallen, unable to stir a muscle or to utter a sound, unable to give the smallest outward sign of life. And yet the mind was awake, alive to the horrors of his situation. Gaspar was buried in the midst of his treasures in the living grave which he had so carefully prepared, so jealously concealed. Men would search for him and never find him. But would they even search? Gaspar recalled with anguish the intention of sudden flight which he had expressed to

his sister. She who cared for him, she who loved him, she who, under other circumstances, would never have rested until she had found him, would naturally conclude from his own words that he had fled from fear of exposure, and would not even make an attempt to discover the place of his retreat. It would never never be discovered, till, perhaps, ages hence, when the edifice above had crumbled away, the foundations might be dug up, and a nameless skeleton found surrounded by heaps of money, and treasures of silver plate. Gaspar had meditated flying from duty, and stern judgment had arrested him on the threshold. In the gloomy silent vault the sinner was left alone with God and his conscience. The candle which Gaspar had brought with him burnt down, flickered in the socket, went out. All was darkness, all silence, all horror! It was as if the fearful sentence had already been passed upon him who had been enslaved by the love of money, *Your gold and silver is cankered, and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire; ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.*

CHAPTER XXIII.

A SISTER'S VOICE.

LOTTIE had not been alarmed by not hearing from her mother, well knowing that though Mrs. Stone was able to read, she had never penned a letter in the course of her life. Lottie talked cheerfully and hopefully to Steady on the evening following that on which the last meeting had been held, as they sat together by the little window after the work of the day was over.

"Now that Mr. Arthur has come back, it do seem as if everything were a-brightening," said she. "He's getting over his sickness wonderful, and I don't believe as father's was ever half so bad. Father will be a-coming home too, and Mr. Arthur will speak a word for him, I'm sure that he will, and get him work at the factory again, or maybe at the Castle. Mother won't need to work so hard, and we'll have a nice little cottage of our own, and not have to live in a lodging over a shop."

Brightly glowed the reflection of the setting sun on the windows of the opposite side of the street, and Lottie's black eyes, as she gazed on it, seemed to

have caught the cheerful gleam; but even as she looked the sun sank below the western horizon, the ruddy light gradually faded away, and the gray hue of twilight succeeded.

"There be mother!" suddenly exclaimed young Stone, rising quickly from his seat, as with weary step a lonely woman turned the corner of the street, bending as if under a heavy burden of years or sorrow, and never once lifting her drooping eyes towards her home as she approached it.

"Mother; alone! Oh, where—where has she left father?" exclaimed Lottie, starting up and running to meet her.

Deborah found the door open, and Lottie there with a look of eager inquiry on her face; but no word was uttered, for the sight of her mother's countenance and the scraps of shabby mourning which she wore, took from the young warm-hearted girl all power of speech. She followed Deborah upstairs, thankful that Mrs. Green chanced to be at the moment out of the way.

"How's father?" asked the son, who had met his mother on the staircase.

Deborah made no reply, but entered the room, sank wearily on a chair, and buried her face in her hands. She was a woman who seldom wept, but now her whole frame shook with convulsive sobs. Lottie knelt down beside her, looking up with anxious grief and fear into her mother's face. She

could with difficulty catch the meaning of Mrs. Stone's scarcely articulate words: "Thank God! at least I was in time to see him, to be with him, at the last." Then the widow raised her head, stretched out her arms, and drew sobbing to her heart her two fatherless children.

Yes, the long-cherished dream of hope was over; the erring husband—forgiven, loved, and watched for—had returned to his native shore to die. Stone had seen his injured wife, and breathed his last sigh in her arms. Had he died a penitent? Deborah fondly clung to the hope; and when she had a little regained her composure, repeated to her children again and again every faintly-breathed sentence from the lips of the dying man that could possibly be deemed an expression of penitence or an utterance of prayer. Who could have borne to have quenched her hope, or who would dare to say that the daily supplication of wife and children for a wandering sinner had not been answered at last?

As Deborah had hardly had one hour's uninterrupted sleep during the preceding week, she was almost overpowered by physical weariness as well as by mental distress; and Lottie had little difficulty in persuading her to go to bed at once. This was the poor widow's only place of refuge from the intrusion of her neighbours; for no sooner was it noised through Axe that Mrs. Stone had returned home after attending the death-bed of her husband,

than some impelled by sympathy, some by mere curiosity, visited her humble lodging, tormenting the weeping Lottie with questions, or well-meant attempts at offering consolation. She was thankful to close the door at last upon all, and with a very heavy heart prepare to go herself to rest.

"Shall we have just a bit of a prayer together, Steady, as we always have?" said the poor girl, with a faltering voice. It had been the habit of the brother and sister thus to pray, from the time when they had knelt as children together in their cottage home at Wildwaste, perhaps to be startled from their knees by the noisy entrance of a parent reeling home from the ale-house. Steady was very quiet, almost stolid; he had had no outburst of sorrow on hearing of the death of his father; perhaps those miserable days at Wildwaste had left deeper memories on a mind more slow to receive or to part with impressions; he had certainly never been buoyed up with the same joyous hopes as his sister had been, and was therefore less sensitive to disappointment. The lad knelt down without reply, leaving, as usual, to Lottie the uttering of the simple prayer, to which he was wont to add the closing amen.

"Pray God bless and keep dear—" Lottie could go no further. Alas! who has not felt how the first omission of a dear familiar name in prayer brings vividly to the soul of the mourner the reality of that separation, which, as regards this world, is softened

by no hope. Lottie could only sob, while her brother, slowly and very briefly, concluded the little prayer.

Lottie rose on the morrow with the feeling that there was a great blank in her life; and yet it was not in the nature of things that she should sorrow as long and as deeply for such a parent as Abner had been, as for one who had faithfully fulfilled the duties of husband and father. She resolved to devote herself more than ever to her mother; and was almost glad, for her sake, that she herself had been obliged to leave Wildwaste. The return of Arthur and Lina Madden from Palestine had diverted the attention of gossips from the subject of Lottie's mysterious sovereigns, and as it was widely known that she had been seen on the box of a carriage in which not only Arthur but Mr. Eardley had been seated, slander itself was forced to own that "the gentlefolk, anyways, seemed to know as how Lottie had come honestly by that money; though 'twas a pity, it was, that she made such a mystery about it."

In the afternoon the unwelcome step of Mrs. Green was heard on the stair. It was her third visit on that day to the widow's little room, as she had twice before bustled up "just to see if she could do nothing for the poor soul," as she said, but in reality to pick up scraps of gossip to retail to the baker's sisters and the linendraper's wife. This time, however, Mrs. Green came up eager to impart news

rather than to hear it. Unceremoniously seating herself in the darkened room of sorrow in which were the newly-made widow and her fatherless girl, she said to Lottie, who was preparing the simple afternoon meal, "I say, Lottie Stone, I think that there new house at Wildwaste is somehow bewitched! Here's you a-running away from it, you can't or you won't say why; and now there's its own master suddenly disappeared, and no one knows what's become of him."

"Disappeared!" echoed Lottie, in surprise.

"Ay; no one's seen nothing of him since last night, and all Wildwaste's in a commotion. He'd been to bed, too, that was clear; and no one saw him leave the house in the morning; and Hannah says that she could take her oath that the chain was up on the house-door when she went to it at seven. But Mr. Gritton's not in the Lodge, it's been searched from top to bottom."

"He's been lost in the bog—like that miserable Dan Ford," said Deborah, gloomily.

"No, not that," replied Mrs. Green; "the bog's not in a dangerous state just now; we've had so much hot sunshine, that you might ride a horse across the common from one end to the other."

"Is my dear lady much frightened about her brother?" asked Lottie, who had been listening with breathless interest.

"Not half so much frightened as one might ex-

pect, Hannah says; nor half so much surprised at his disappearing. It seems as if she'd a notion where he has gone, though she does not choose to tell what she knows. But Miss Gritton ain't very well, they says; depend on't, she's in for the fever. There's nothing in the world so catching as small-pox."

Lottie's heart sank within her.

"Mrs. Bolder thinks," continued Mrs. Green, "that Mr. Gritton has just gone off to Lunnon to be out of the way of infection; but it's odd enough that he should have gone away without his hat, for that's hanging up in the hall; and its odder still that he should have been pulling about the furniture like a madman; Hannah told Mrs. Bolder, though she did not say a word of it to trouble Miss Gritton, that she found the study in strange disorder—the table pulled out of its place, the very drugget rolled up!"

Lottie was hardly able to stifle the sudden exclamation which rose to her lips.

Having unburdened herself of her news, Mrs. Green suddenly remembered that her kettle would be boiling over, and bustled out of the room. Lottie waited impatiently for a few seconds, till she was certain that the landlady was out of hearing, and then with energy exclaimed, "Mother, mother, I must be off to Wildwaste, I'm sure and certain I'm wanted."

"I'm sorry you ever left your good place there, Lottie; maybe they would not take you back now,"

said Deborah sadly. As Lottie had had the small-pox in her childhood, her mother did not fear her catching the complaint.

"Whether they will take me back or not, mother, I must go," said Lottie emphatically; "master's lost —maybe I'll find him!" and hurriedly, as if every moment were precious, she took down from their peg her straw-bonnet and cloak.

"It's getting on in the day, my child, and a walk to Wildwaste is a deal too long for you now. To-morrow I'll get the baker to take you in his cart—at least a good bit of the way."

Lottie clasped her hands with a look of anxious entreaty. "Don't stay me, mother, don't stay me. If Wildwaste were twice as far off, I'd walk all the same. I can't stop till to-morrow; I should not close an eye all the night!"

Deborah had never before known her young daughter's mind so resolutely bent upon any course; she saw that some very urgent motive indeed was drawing Lottie towards Wildwaste. She believed this motive to be affection towards her young mistress, and gave up opposing the wishes of her child; only insisting on her taking with her a small bundle of clothes, and refreshing herself by a cup of tea before she started. In less than a quarter of an hour Lottie was hastening on her way towards Wildwaste.

"It's all clear to me," murmured the girl to herself,

as she rapidly walked along the street; "master has gone down into that dismal place to look after his money, and somehow he has locked himself in and cannot get out; and no one thinks of looking for him there; and so he'll be starved to death, or maybe go right mad in that horrible vault. Hannah is hard of hearing—if he called ever so loud she'd never hear him in the kitchen; and my lady is upstairs, so his voice would never reach her. It makes one's blood cold to think of his trying to get help, and shouting and calling, and never a soul going near him! I must go and tell those who are searching where to look." Lottie had been walking very fast, but she slackened her pace as a difficulty occurred to her mind. "But I must not tell any one of that vault—no, not even Miss Isa; have I not solemnly promised to keep the secret? I must go down myself all alone to that gloomy place. But what if master should be hiding there on purpose; or if some one should come on a sudden and find me down there amongst all the silver and gold, might I not be taken for a thief? I have suffered so much already, I could not abide any more of these cruel suspicions; and maybe I'd be sent to prison this time, and that would break mother's heart altogether." The simple girl was so much startled by the images of terror called up by her excited fancy, that for a moment she felt inclined to turn back. "Suppose I tell Miss Isa—only Miss Isa; that would keep my

character clear; and it cannot do harm for her to know where her own brother hoards all his money. But that promise—that fatal promise! What would the Lord have me to do? It is so miserable to be able to ask advice of no one, not even of my own dear mother! I seem going right into the darkness —but then, as Mr. Eardley would say, I've the trumpet of conscience, and the light of the Word, and the Lord Himself will guide me, and make me triumph over all difficulties, if I put my firm trust in Him. It seems so wonderful that the glorious King of heaven should think of or care for a poor ignorant child like me!"

The shades of evening were gathering around her before the weary Lottie trod the well-known path over the common that led to Wildwaste Lodge. She looked up anxiously at the windows as she approached the house; she was uneasy regarding the health of her dear young mistress. When Hannah, after tedious delay, answered Lottie's timid ring at the door-bell, her first anxious question was, 'Oh, tell me, how is Miss Isa?" Lottie had to repeat it, for the old servant seemed more deaf, as well as more ill-tempered than usual.

"She has a head-ache—natural enough, turning herself into a sick-nurse for a stranger as gives more trouble than thanks. And she's a-worritting after master, who has disappeared, no one knows how. But what brings you back, like a bad half-

penny, Lottie?" added the peevish old woman; "you chose to take yourself off without warning, leaving all the work of the house on my hands, and now you may just keep away—there's no one as wants you here!" and Hannah almost shut the door in the face of the girl.

"Let me in—for just this night—oh, let me in. I've walked all the six miles from Axe; I can't go back in the dark all alone!" pleaded Lottie, whose brow and lip were moist with toil drops, and who felt the absolute necessity of searching the vault without the delay of another hour. "Hannah, I'll work like a slave; I'll do anything that you bid me; just speak a word for me to my mistress, pray her to let me stop, at least—at least till the morning."

"How can I be worritting Miss Isa, with asking anything for the like of you," said Hannah ungraciously, opening the door, however, a little wider, so as to give admittance to Lottie. "You may go there into the kitchen—everything there wants cleaning and looking arter, for not a minute have I had to myself this blessed day, what with the fetching and carrying upstairs, downstairs, and all the stir about master, which has turned the house upside down. There—you get water from the pump, and fill the kettle, and wash up the plates, while I go up with the medicine; there's Miss Madden's bell ringing like mad!"

Lottie retired to the kitchen, but neither to rest

nor to work. After listening for a few moments to the slow step of the old servant as she mounted the stairs, grumbling at every step, the girl seized her opportunity, and darted into the study. The table had not been drawn back to its place, the brown drugget lay as Gaspar had left it; but though Lottie knew the situation of the trap-door in the floor, she could not at once discover it, either owing to the opening being so well concealed, or from her own nervous haste causing confusion in her mind. Having at last, rather by feeling than by sight, found the portion of the planks that could be moved, Lottie lifted the trap-door and again timidly gazed down into the darkness below. Before she ventured to descend she paused and listened, to make certain that Hannah was still upstairs. She heard the woman's heavy step in the room above, and then, feeling that every minute was precious, Lottie hastily descended the ladder. Not having brought a light with her, and the vault being utterly dark, the girl had to grope to find the handle of that inner door which Gaspar had closed, but not locked behind him. Lottie pressed against the door, but felt that something within resisted her efforts to push it open. She used more strength, pressing with knee and shoulder; the resisting body, whatever it might be, yielded a little under her efforts. There was an opening sufficiently wide to admit the girl's hand. Lottie sank on her knees, and put down her hand

in order to feel what was the nature of the obstruction which the darkness prevented her from seeing, and uttered a shriek of horror upon touching a clammy human face! A frightful conviction flashed on her mind that her master had been murdered for his money, and that it was his corpse which lay within the vault.

"Oh, they've killed him!" she exclaimed aloud in accents of terror, starting to her feet, as she uttered the exclamation of fear.

"Killed whom—in mercy speak!" cried the agonized voice of Isa from above. Miss Gritton had chanced to enter the study in search of some papers, and was with astonishment bending over the open trap-door, when she caught the sound of the terrible words from below. Isa could scarcely see the top rounds of the ladder, so obscure had the twilight become; she knew not whither it might lead, or what horrors might lie at the bottom, yet she hesitated not for one instant, and almost before the sound of her terrified question had died away, she was at the side of Lottie in the utter darkness of the vault.

"Master has been murdered!" gasped the young maid. Gaspar could hear her exclamation distinctly, but was unable to speak a word in reply.

"Gaspar—oh, my brother!" cried Isa, in a tone of piercing distress.

That cry from the lips of a sister broke the spell of the strange trance with which Gaspar Gritton had

been bound. During all the long hours of his terrible imprisonment he had been unable to stir or to make the least sound, and though he was conscious of Lottie's presence when she touched him, and could hear her voice, he had still remained as it were dead, helpless as a corpse in his living grave. But to Isa's call, to his inexpressible relief, Gaspar was able to answer; the hitherto paralysed limbs stirred with life, and with a murmured "God be praised!" he awoke from what appeared to him like a dream of unutterable horror.

But Gaspar's powers were in a very feeble state; he was unable at first even to move far enough from the door which divided him from his sister for it to be opened sufficiently wide to admit of her passing through.

"Oh, for a light!" exclaimed Isa, then hearing Hannah's step in the study above, she called out loudly, "Bring light—help—quick, quick—your master's dying down here in the vault!"

Some minutes of terrible anxiety followed; Isa dreaded to see what light might reveal, for the idea of murder, first suggested by Lottie, was uppermost in her mind. Hannah had rushed towards the hamlet to summon aid; Isa sent Lottie up the ladder for a light; the girl had hardly procured it when the hall of the Lodge was filled with a party of workmen, whom Hannah's loud call for assistance had brought to the house.

By the help of the men's strong arms, Mr. Gritton was carried up from his gloomy prison-vault, and laid on his bed. Thankful indeed was Isa to find that her brother was unwounded, and apparently unhurt, though in a very weak and nervous condition. She neither questioned him, nor suffered him to be questioned, but she marked the glances of surprise and suspicion exchanged between the workmen, who had seen what they were never designed to see, and learnt what they were never intended to know. Gaspar's secret was a secret no longer, except as regarded his way of acquiring the hoards of treasure, of which an exaggerated account spread through all the hamlet before the morning.

Having thanked, rewarded, and dismissed the workmen, Isa sat for hours watching by her brother, and listening to a confession from his lips which filled her heart with mingled grief, shame, thankfulness and hope.

There are some men whom judgments only harden —a thunderbolt might shatter, but it never would melt them—Gaspar's nature resembled not such. He felt on that solemn night much as Dives might have felt had his tortured spirit received a reprieve, and been permitted once more to dwell upon earth. He had been given a glimpse, as if by the lurid light of the devouring flame, of the utter worthlessness of all for which man would exchange his immortal soul. The impression might become weakened by time,

but upon that night it was strong. Gaspar unburdened his soul to his sister; he told her all, even to Lottie's discovery of the treasure, and besought Isa's counsel in the difficult strait into which his covetousness had brought him.

Confession — reparation! From these Gaspar shrank, as the patient from the knife of the surgeon. Could no milder remedy be found, could there be no compromise with conscience? Isa dared suggest none, though she would have given all that she possessed on earth to save her brother from the bitter humiliation of acknowledging to Cora Madden the base fraud which he had committed. The strength of Isa's faith and obedience was brought to painful proof on that night. If she had yielded but a point, if she had counselled delay, if she had administered an opiate to the tortured conscience of her brother, as all her tender woman's nature, ay, and all her woman's pride, pleaded for her to do, Gaspar would, like Felix, have put off the hated duty for a more convenient season, and the precious moment for action would have passed away for ever. But Isa had the fear of God before her eyes; she had a keen perception that this was a crisis in the spiritual life of her brother, that his soul's interests for eternity might hang on the result of his decision on that night. Her voice had aroused him from the death-like stupor of the body, her voice was to be also the means of quickening the lethargic soul. The whisper

of delay in his case could but be the breathing of the enemy who would lure him to destruction. Isa reminded Gaspar of the resolution of Zaccheus, when he had received the Lord into his home and his heart; it was not "I will give," but *I give;* it was not "I will restore," but *I restore.* Gaspar was irresolute, undecided, but his good angel was beside him to help his weak nature in the great mental conflict. It was almost midnight before that trying interview ended, and the brother and sister separated, the one to sink into a troubled slumber, the other to return to the chamber of Cora, entrusted by Gaspar with the responsible and most painful charge of making for him that humiliating confession which he himself had not the courage to make.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A TRIUMPH.

WITH a very slow step, aching heart, and knees that trembled beneath her, Isa re-ascended the staircase. One apparently insuperable difficulty had been overcome, Gaspar had consented to make full reparation. Isa could feel thankful for this; but she had now a breathing-space for consideration, and with inexpressible repugnance she now recoiled from the task set before her. It had been hard to banish from her heart resentful emotions in regard to Cora; it had been hard to Isa to receive an enemy into her home, to tend her as a sister, to risk health and life in her service. But there had been nothing to wound pride in all this; on the contrary, Isa had stood in the elevated position of a benefactress, as one enjoying the noblest kind of revenge by repaying injuries with kindness. The consciousness of this had brought a feeling of gratification. But her position was painfully altered now; Isa must humble herself in the presence of a woman whom she neither loved nor respected; she must, as the representative of her brother, confess

guilt—ask for forgiveness—plead for mercy! Isa stopped half-way on the stairs, supporting herself on the banister, for every fibre in her frame was trembling with strong emotion. She had ventured, as it were, to the outskirts of the camp of Midian, and felt that she lacked courage to strike the final blow for freedom. A silent cry for help arose to heaven from the depths of a suffering heart.

Cora was one to whom it would be especially painful to make a confession such as that which burdened the soul of Isa. Miss Madden had been brought much into contact with the world, had imbibed its spirit, and adopted one of its most dangerous ideas, namely, a disbelief in the existence of faith as a ruling motive. Notwithstanding the noble example of piety which she had had before her in her own brother, Cora had persisted in regarding all men as governed either by self-interest or the love of approbation.

"Sir Robert Walpole said, and said truly," Cora had once lightly observed, "that every man has his price; only some will have it told down in hard cash, and others are quite contented with the paper-money of praise."

Thus Cora refused to see the reflected glory of the Saviour in His people; however brightly their light might shine, she believed that it was fed from an earthly source, and eagerly caught at every instance of inconsistency in the servants of God to

confirm her theory that they only wore piety as a mask, and, in fact, were much the same with the show of religion, as the rest of the world were without it.

It was this fallacy more than anything else that had hardened the heart of Cora, and made her justify herself in her own indifference towards spiritual things. She would draw down all to the same low level as herself, and thus hope to escape condemnation in a crowd. Cora's chilling disbelief in the practical influence of faith had been shaken when she had first been admitted into the home of Isa Gritton while suffering from an infectious complaint. The ice which the world had encrusted round her heart had given some signs of melting. Then the idea that the Grittons were, after all, only acting from self-interest, had almost restored her frigid scepticism; she would not recognize the reality and the power of that faith which worketh by love. The sudden and strange disappearance of Gaspar had confirmed Cora in her impressions. "He flies me because he fears me," was the reflection of the proud woman; and the insolence of her spirit had broken out even in the presence of the anxious sister. "Perhaps Miss Gritton has an idea not only whither, but for what cause, her brother had so suddenly vanished from this neighbourhood," had been Cora's sneering remark.

And yet, with all her bitterness and worldliness

of spirit, Cora was capable of more generous feeling. She was a woman, and, like a woman, could cherish disinterested affection. Cora keenly felt her own isolation in life, that isolation which she feared that her personal disfigurement would now render perpetual. She had cut herself off from the proffered affection of Arthur and Lina; she had quarrelled with Lionel's wife; she had many acquaintances, but was painfully aware that she had never made one true friend. Cora, especially during her illness, had often yearned for the love of a gentle, sympathizing heart, and something of gratitude, something of admiration, had drawn her towards Isa Gritton.

"How ill Miss Gritton looks to-night; I fear that she is sickening for the fever," Mrs. Holdich had observed, on Isa's quitting the room to go and search for papers in the study, at the time when, as the reader knows, Lottie was exploring the vault.

The observation had inflicted a sharp pang on Cora; she was startled on realizing the possibility that Isa's life might indeed be given for her own, and a contrast would suggest itself between the comparative value of those lives. Isa, as Cora knew from Rebekah Holdich, was the light of her brother's home, the gentle benefactress of the poor, and, as Cora was at that very time experiencing, a generous friend to those who needed her aid. In her, more than in any one else, Cora had caught a glimpse of the beauty of holiness; in her, more than in any one

else, Cora had been almost forced to recognize the power of faith; and at that moment the proud, cold woman felt that there was one being on earth whom she could love, one whom she could not endure to see fall a sacrifice to her generous kindness to herself.

Cora's bitter but salutary reflections were interrupted by the noise and excitement below, which followed the discovery of Gaspar Gritton in the vault. The loud call of Hannah for assistance was distinctly heard in the upper rooms occupied by Miss Madden, and Cora sent down Mrs. Holdich in haste to ascertain the cause of such an unusual disturbance. Rebekah did not return for a considerable time, and Cora grew so impatient that she could hardly restrain herself from hurrying downstairs. Mrs. Holdich came at last with the information that Mr. Gritton had been found in an insensible state in a vault, that he had been removed to his own apartment, and that his sister was carefully tending him there. This was all which Cora could learn from Rebekah, and it did not satisfy her thirst for information; she determined not to retire to rest until she had seen Isa Gritton. To beguile the time, Cora went up to Isa's little bookcase, hoping to find there some light reading to amuse herself with. One volume, from the elegance of its binding, attracted Miss Madden's attention, and she drew it forth from its place. It contained no work of

fiction, as Cora had hoped and expected, but a selection of hymns. At another time Cora would have replaced the book, with perhaps an expression of scorn; but she was in a softened mood on that night, and her eye was attracted by the marking and double-marking on the margin of many of the pages. Chiefly from curiosity, but possibly from a better motive, Miss Madden carried the book to the place where she usually sat on her soft-cushioned chair, seated herself, and began to read in a desultory way.

One of the hymns which had been most strongly marked by Isa was the well-known one commencing with the line:

"And dost thou say, ask what thou wilt?"

This hymn was an especial favourite with Isa, who knew it by heart; but the proud selfish woman who now perused it in the stillness of night, and the seclusion of a sick-room, seemed to be introduced into a new world of sensation as she read the lines, which express a Christian's most fervent desire.

"More of Thy presence, Lord, impart,
More of Thine image let me bear.
Enthrone Thyself within my heart,
And reign without a rival there.

"Grant this request, I ask no more,
But to thy care the rest resign;—
Sick, or in health, or rich, or poor,
All shall be well if Thou art mine."

"Can it be that any human being really feels thus?" thought Cora, half closing the volume; "I cannot

believe it; and yet Isa Gritton has acted as if she felt it. But no, no—she is at this moment playing the part of an accomplice of her money-loving brother. Her faith may make her like such a book as this, mark it, perhaps cry over it; it may give her that gentleness and kindliness which have half won me over to love her in spite of myself; it may —yes, it may possibly have some effect in taking away the fear of losing beauty, or even life; but when it comes to the question of its requiring such integrity of conduct as would involve loss and disgrace, faith will find it expedient to confine itself to sentimental devotion, and the saint will come forth from the closet to act in the world—as the children of the world always act."

A gentle hand noiselessly turned the handle of the door, and Isa glided into the room. She was surprised to see Cora still awake, and sitting up at the midnight hour.

"I thought that I should have found my patient asleep," she observed.

"I could not have slept till I had seen you; I wanted to hear about your brother."

Isa rather sank than seated herself upon a chair; a cold shiver ran through her frame; she knew not if the overpowering sensations which oppressed her arose only from the reaction after painful excitement, or if she were indeed sickening for a terrible complaint.

"I may be delirious ere morning," thought Isa; "I must speak now or I never may have power to speak. May it not be deemed providential that I am given an opportunity of confession by this midnight interview with Cora?"

"Miss Gritton, you look sadly ill," said Cora, with more of sympathy than Isa had ever before heard in her tone. "Are you very anxious regarding your brother?"

"I am very anxious indeed," replied Isa, faintly, glancing at the closed door which divided the ladies from the room in which Mrs. Holdich was resting, to be sure that no ear but Cora's should hear what she was bracing up her courage to say. "Miss Madden, I have come charged with a message to you from Gaspar." Isa paused, for she was very breathless; her heart fluttered—she had a strange difficulty in articulating her words; she dared not look up and meet the keen gaze which she was certain was fixed upon her. "My brother believes—feels sure that there is no evidence which could be produced in a court of law which could bring home to him that—that of which you have been led to suspect him." Another very painful pause; Isa pressed her hand to her side to still the throbbing of her heart. "But," she continued with an effort, "Gaspar knows—owns—that though man cannot convict, there is a higher tribunal than man's, and before it he cannot plead his innocence. It was

indeed not your property which was lost in the *Orissa*—your money is in the hands of my brother, and shall be restored, principal and interest; you shall have ample satisfaction as far as gold can give it. And oh, Cora—Miss Madden—will not this compensation suffice? will you not forgive all the past, and spare the reputation of him who thus throws himself on your indulgence? will you not shield from reproach one who is ready amply to redeem the wrong committed under strong temptation, and show your generosity by burying this unhappy affair in silence and oblivion?"

Isa clasped her hands as she spoke in the fervour of her pleading; her eyes suddenly raised met those of Cora, and to her surprise beheld them brimming over with tears. Cora rose from her seat. "Oh, Isa," she exclaimed, "fear nothing from me! Had the wrong been tenfold, I have learned from you how to forgive,—and much beside!" and with a burst of emotion which all her pride could not restrain, Cora threw her arms around Isa, who found herself, to her great astonishment, pressed to the heart of one who had been her bitter, malignant enemy.

The victories of faith are not only over inward foes; when the ways of a man are pleasing to the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him. Isa, in her gentleness and Christian sympathy, her uprightness, her obedience to the call of duty, had done more to lead a proud erring heart

to repentance than all the sermons which had fallen on the ear of Cora like seed on the trodden wayside. Cora had never realized how far she herself was from being a Christian, till she had seen exemplified in one of her own sex and station what a Christian should be. It was in the hour when Isa felt humiliated, covered with shame for the errors of a brother, that she had forced from proud lips that tribute to her character which was in itself an acknowledgment of inferiority such as no being had ever before wrung from Cora Madden. Isa had won a noble triumph—she had conquered the heart of her foe.

CHAPTER XXV.

THERE was much excitement in Wildwaste relative to the occurrences of that night. Various rumours spread, with more or less of truth in them, concerning Gaspar Gritton, and the strange way in which he had been discovered lying in a lifeless state in a mysterious vault full of treasure. As Lottie was re-instated in her place, and Cora was convalescent, the services of Mrs. Holdich were no longer required; the steward's wife — after changing her infected garments — returned to her home, where she was besieged by curious inquirers. Rebekah smiled at the strange exaggerations which had spread around, like widening circles on a lake into which a pebble has been thrown. It was true, she said, that Lottie had performed an important service, had been the means of preserving her master's life, for which she would be liberally rewarded; but as regarded the vault and its mysterious contents, Rebekah maintained a placid silence. She had a note from Isa to convey to the Castle, in which Arthur and Lina Madden were now residing as the baronet's guests. The

result of that note was, that Holdich appeared that afternoon at Wildwaste Lodge, equipped for a journey to London, part of his equipment being a pair of loaded revolvers. Crowds of workmen and their families thronged before the Lodge, curiously watching the door through which were borne iron boxes, very heavy in proportion to their size, and believed to contain treasures of plate and bullion sufficient to buy up the village. With emotions of intense relief and deep thankfulness Isa watched from the window the departure of the cart for the station, with the sturdy steward seated on one of the boxes within it, keeping faithful watch over his dangerous charge. It was not only because in that lawless part of the country the Lodge would scarcely have been a safe residence when known to contain a treasure, that Isa rejoiced in its departure; it was because she looked on that ill-gotten gold much as our ancestors looked upon the barrels of gunpowder buried in a vault beneath Parliament-house by an insidious and cruel foe. It had been placed there not to enrich, but to destroy; not as a blessing, but a curse;—*an enemy hath done this.* From the days of Achan unto our own, there is a woe for him who heapeth up riches unrighteously won.

No one from the Lodge appeared at the steward's cottage on that evening, and he himself was absent on his mission to London; but Edith Lestrange and her guests came from the Castle to attend Mr.

Eardley's closing lecture on the "Triumph over Midian."

LECTURE VII.

FAITH CROWNED.

The men of Ephraim, as was mentioned at our last meeting, had encountered some of the fugitives of Midian, had slain two of their princes, and brought their heads to Gideon. But the Ephraimites, men of a warlike tribe, were angry at having been appointed but a secondary part; they were indignant at the chief honour, as well as the chief danger of the struggle having been assigned to Gideon's three hundred heroes.

"Why hast thou served us thus," they fiercely exclaimed to the leader, "that thou calledst us not, when thou wentest to fight the Midianites?" They came full of jealous resentment; and instead of rejoicing in the triumph, chafed at not having sooner been permitted to share it.

Only by pride cometh contention; with the lowly is wisdom. Gideon, humble in the midst of his marvellous success, experienced the power of the soft answer to turn away wrath. He said unto the indignant warriors, *What have I done now in comparison of you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer? God hath delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb, and Zeeb: and what was I able to do*

in comparison of you ? Then, adds the sacred narrative, *their anger was abated towards him.*

But it was not with the proud sons of Ephraim, but with his own band, the chosen of God, that Gideon completed his victory by following up the pursuit beyond Jordan. They held a commission from the Most High, and exchanging their trumpets and torches for weapons of war, *faint yet pursuing,* they pressed on. Weary and hungry were the brave warriors of Gideon ; they lacked refreshment to renew their failing strength, but that refreshment was cruelly withheld, first by the men of Succoth, and then by those of Penuel, from whom Gideon had craved the much needed supplies. These inhabitants of Succoth and Penuel, sons of Israel unworthy of the name, afterwards received the punishment due for their indifference to a holy cause—their base inhospitable neglect of those bearing the burden and heat of the conflict.

And can we find none even in a Christian land whose conduct closely resembles that of the men of Succoth and Penuel ? The missionaries of the Cross are engaged in a long and arduous struggle to carry the banner of their Lord into the strongholds of heathen error. They are a small and, as regards numbers, a feeble band ; they need support and sympathy from those who dwell at ease in their peaceful homes. For them their heavenly Leader deigns to ask the aid of their brethren. In the words of Gideon we seem to

hear the Lord's, *Give, I pray you, loaves of bread unto the people that follow me, for they be faint.* And how is that appeal received by the greater number of those who call themselves Christians? Some, indeed, rejoice to bring out their offerings; they deem it an honour to be permitted to give from their stores and refresh the fainting powers of those who are foremost in fighting the good fight of faith. To these how sweet the Saviour's promise to His disciples, *Whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in My name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward!*

But shall not the multitudes who give no aid to the servants of God, who share the guilt of Penuel and Succoth, fear to share their punishment also? It is lack of faith that hardens the heart, that closes the hand; for who could refuse to give—give largely, give to the utmost of his power—if he really *believed* that at the last day those who have turned a deaf ear to the appeal of the weary, shall hear from the lips of the Eternal Judge the terrible words, *Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me. Depart from Me, ye cursed!*

Faint, yet pursuing, Gideon and his band followed on the track of Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian. These, with about fifteen thousand men who had escaped from the slaughter which followed the sounding of the trumpets, had reached Karkor,

and believed themselves there to be secure from further attack. *Faint, but pursuing!* Thus, in his life-long warfare against sin, presses on the Christian from grace to grace, till God receives him to glory. He must not sheath the sword of the Spirit while one evil passion remains unsubdued; he must not relax his efforts till the Almighty Himself perfect the victory within him, and call him to inherit the kingdom above. We may have much to discourage us, much to try our courage and patience; it is not by one effort, however great, that the yoke of Midian can be broken, that faith can finally triumph over corruption within. *Let patience have its perfect work;* however long and arduous may be the pursuit, God can uphold, strengthen, and bless us, as in His name and for His sake we struggle on, *faint yet pursuing.*

Complete success crowned the efforts of Gideon. He came up with the men of Midian, discomfited all their host, and took captive their kings Zebah and Zalmunna. As they were not of the doomed races of Canaan, the leader of Israel would have spared these foes, had they not been stained with the blood of his brethren whom, by the Midianites' own confession, they had slain at Tabor. Gideon was by law the avenger of this blood. The sacred record gives us a striking glimpse of the way in which justice was satisfied in that remote age—the brief investigation, and the prompt execution by the hand

of the near of kin, according to the commandment of Moses: *the murderer shall surely be put to death; the revenger of blood himself shall slay the murderer; when he meeteth him, he shall slay him* (Numbers xxxv. 18, 19). Gideon inquired of Zebah and Zalmunna, "What manner of men were they whom ye slew at Tabor?"—evidently alluding to some well-known act of violence. And the princes made answer, "As thou art, so were they; each one resembled the children of a king." And he said, "They were my brethren, even the sons of my mother: as the Lord liveth, if ye had saved them alive, I would not slay you."

Gideon then commanded his first-born to fulfil the stern duty of the avenger of blood; but the youth shrank from the office. "Rise thou, and fall upon us," cried the bold sons of Midian to Gideon; "for as the man is, so is his strength." By the hand of their conqueror, therefore, Zebah and Zalmunna met the fate which their crimes had deserved.

The victories of Gideon, his great services rendered to his country, had won for him the enthusiastic admiration and gratitude of the people whom he had freed from the enemy's yoke. Nothing was deemed by his countrymen too great a reward for the hero who had delivered them. Let him who had saved Israel become the head of the nation, the first of a dynasty of rulers. The men of Israel said unto Gideon, "Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son,

and thy son's son also; for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian."

But Gideon's had been the triumph of faith, not the proud struggle of ambition. He desired no crown; he would mount no throne; the Lord God of Hosts alone should be the King of Israel. "I will not rule over you," said Gideon; "neither shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you." It is to God alone that belongeth the power and the glory; it was God who had smitten down Midian, and Gideon, great in humility as in his faith, gave the honour to God. Rich was the blessing that followed, as recorded in the page of Scripture, *Thus was Midian subdued before the children of Israel, so that they lifted up their heads no more. And the country was in quietness forty years in the days of Gideon.*

We have seen, in the history before us, the tree of faith budding, bearing fair blossoms, and then its fruits gradually ripening into perfection. We now see, as it were, those precious fruits gathered and laid as an offering upon the altar of the Lord. The Saviour *shall come to be glorified in His saints, and admired in all them that believe;* the harvest is His, His servants lay its treasures at His feet.

And what is the practical lesson, my brethren, left on our minds by the record of the perils, the exploits, and the success of Gideon? Can we trace in it any likeness to the experience of our own soul?

Have we received the angel's visit, heard the promise, obeyed the command? Have we thrown down the idolatrous shrine in the spirit breathed in the words of the poet,—

> "The dearest idol I have known,
> Whate'er that idol be,
> Help me to tear it from its throne,
> And worship only Thee?"

Have we trusted to God alone to strengthen us for the conflict with sin by the grace of His Holy Spirit, and with His Word in our hands have we invaded the enemy's camp, and pursued him with earnest, self-denying zeal? Have we fought and conquered our Midianites by the power of living faith?

Or, to change the metaphor, has faith been with us as the blighted tree, on which the sunshine falls in vain, which stands a bare form, a lifeless thing, when spring clothes all around it with verdure? Has the Lord of the vineyard said of it, *Lo, these three,* or ten, or twenty, *years I come seeking fruit and finding none. Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?* Oh, my brethren, that faith which is shown not by deeds, that faith which works not by love, is *not* the faith which is firmly rooted in the Rock of Ages. A cold assent of the reason is not faith, a lifeless profession is not faith; that is faith which beareth good fruits, that which, like the faith of Gideon, overcometh the enemy.

We have to pursue our Midianites to the Jordan,

but not beyond Jordan. At the fords of "the narrow stream of death" the last enemy will perish for ever. Into the bright land beyond, disappointment, discontent cannot enter, for there is the fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore. Dissension is unknown where every look and thought are love; nor can the shadow of distrust fall in the realm of eternal light, for the servants of Christ shall *see Him as He is*, and dwell with Him in bliss everlasting.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CONCLUSION.

MONTHS had rolled away, months crowded with incidents of interest to the personages in my story, and now Edith and Isa stand again on the summit of the grassy mound by Castle Lestrange, which overlooks a landscape so wide and so fair. They behold nature no longer clad in the light-green drapery of spring, spangled with blossoms, but in the rich full foliage of summer, which the setting sun is bathing in golden glory. Edith's blue eyes are gazing on the magnificent sky, where the bright orb of day, while sinking down on a throne of fiery clouds, is throwing upwards widening streams of light where rosy clouds, like islands of the blest, softly float in clear blue ether. Never, even in Italy, had Edith witnessed a finer sunset; it seemed like a glimpse granted to mortals below of the coming glories of heaven.

"How resplendent is the sky!" exclaimed Edith, after a pause of silent admiration.

"And how beautiful the earth!" added Isa.

"Ah, on the eve of your bridal day, dearest, the

prospect may well look fair in your eyes, but still it owes its chief beauty to the radiance above it."

"I think that it must always be so to the Christian," observed Isa. "The very crown of earthly happiness is to think that it is not all earthly; that our Lord who has joined our hearts together, will also join our hands; and that the union which He makes will endure when that sun itself is dark!" Isa's eyes glistened with tears as she spoke, but they welled up from a deep fount of joy.

"Just look towards Wildwaste!" cried Edith; "they have finished that triumphal arch of evergreens and roses at which Lottie and her brother, and all the children of the hamlet, have been working so hard since daybreak. I never thought that Wildwaste could put on an appearance so bright and so gay. Every cottage has its garland, and I should not wonder if the manufactory itself burst into an illumination to-morrow."

"I suspect that the enthusiasm and the rejoicing," said Isa gayly, "is less on account of the wedding than to express the joy of the hamlet at Arthur Madden's being appointed to succeed Mr. Bull. Old Bolder was speaking so warmly on the subject this morning. 'There will be good days for Wildwaste yet,' he said, 'now that we've a pastor who will work, and pray while he works; who loves his people, and will make them love him! We'll not have all the drunkenness and riot which have made Wild-

waste a blot on the land! I've felt better ever since I heard the good news,' he added, rubbing his hands; 'and I'll make a shift, I will, to throw away my crutches, and get to church the day that Mr. Arthur gives his first sermon.'"

"Every one welcomes their young clergyman as the benefactor of the place," observed Edith.

"Lottie would be almost sorry to leave Wildwaste," said Isa, "were she not going with me to Axe, where she will be close to her widowed mother, and able often to be with her."

"The only person for whom I feel sorry in the midst of all this rejoicing," observed Edith, "is your poor brother, Mr. Gritton. He will miss you so sadly, when all alone in that dreary house at Wildwaste."

"I suspect that he will not be long alone," said Isa.

"What—is it true then?" asked Edith quickly, glancing up into the face of her companion; "but surely, surely it must grieve you to think of having Cora Madden as a sister!"

"Some months ago it would have grieved me inexpressibly," replied Isa gravely. "I should have deemed such a connection a heavy misfortune; but Cora is changed, so much changed, since her illness."

"I hear that the small-pox has left deep traces—"

"Yes, on her character," interrupted Isa. "Cora is much softened, I hope humbled; there is so much

less of asperity in her manner, of sarcasm in her tone. Is it not strange, Edith, that she of whom I once spoke so harshly when you and I stood here conversing together, should seem now to turn towards me with the affection of a sister."

"You have indeed been a sister to her, dear Isa; often have I wondered at your courage in braving infection, and your unselfishness in enduring quarantine, and all for one whom you dis—whom you could not love. But yours was the courage, the self-devotion of faith, and God guarded you from the danger."

"God has indeed crowned me with loving-kindness and tender mercies!" exclaimed Isa, whose quick eye had caught sight at that moment of a well-known form advancing up the avenue. All her cares and fears, all her difficulties and trials, had now been exchanged for exceeding joy; every cloud in her sky, like those round the sun, had become a golden mansion of light.

Shall earth be called only "a vale of tears," and all its hopes be compared to a withering leaf? Is happiness below but a fading vision? Not so; for even here the Almighty can throw sunshine around His children, and sweeten their cup with drops from that fountain of bliss whose full stream shall refresh their spirits above! But for whom is such happiness prepared? Not for the fearful and unbelieving, not for the selfish and self-willed, but for those who,

like Gideon, have obeyed God's word and chosen His service, and rendered faithful obedience to Him whose mercy hath redeemed them. The Christian must not look for the victory without the struggle, nor hope for peace while the smallest sin retains dominion within the soul; it is on the night of conflict that dawns the morn of success; to God's faithful warriors, *faint yet pursuing*, was given the triumph of faith over Midian!

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